“LOOK, I HAVE GONE THROUGH THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND I HAVE TRIED DAMN HARD TO GET TO WHERE I AM, SO NO ONE IS GONNA STOP ME!”: THE EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS AND EXPERIENCES OF BLACK BRITISH WOMEN GRADUATES

by

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ABSTRACT

This research critically explores the educational experiences and journeys of 25 diverse Black British women graduates. Grounded in Black Feminist Epistemology and building upon Mirza's (1992) groundbreaking study, the graduates share their experiential knowledge of journeying through the English education system — from primary school until university. Using semi-structured interviewing and framed by Critical Race Theory and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, a nuanced picture emerges of the influences of this group's Black British identities, intersecting with gender, class, ethnicity and cultural background, on their educational trajectories. This research highlights some of the unique challenges encountered by this group — underpinned by antiblack racism — including: their positioning and experiences within different educational institutions; their disconnect from Eurocentric curriculums; alongside internalised pressures impacting upon their mental health. Yet, due to strong obligations to achieving educational 'success', individual and collective strategies are utilised to overcome such challenges. Lastly, narrow understandings of educational 'success,' based on meritocratic and neoliberal foundations are interrogated. I argue that current understandings fail to acknowledge inherent inequalities within the education system that make it difficult for Black British women graduates to achieve, and that when they do, it often does not yield the same rewards as those enjoyed by their peers.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to five truly important individuals who mean so much to me, and who were especially invaluable throughout my PhD journey:

To my mother, Ms Modupe Tawakalitu Juliana Pennant – who is my motivation and my inspiration.

To my father, Mr Gilbert George Pennant Jr – who is my rock.

To my sister, Ms Felicia Oluwakemi Pennant– who is the most supportive, hardworking and ambitious person I know.

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And

To my great-grandmother and guardian angel, Mrs Adejoju Felicia Ogunlana.

I also dedicate this thesis to every Black girl and woman who values education and develops many different intentional and unintentional strategies to succeed, whilst also working *hard*.

I see you; I feel you; I am you and I cherish your stories.

And lastly,

To my future babies, I hope that when it is your time, it will be easier for you.

May you always have the energy, strength and power to smash every barrier that prevents you from proceeding to where you want or need to be- just like I have. Whatever happens, you will never walk alone. *Àṣẹ.*

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BAME= Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
BME= Black and Minority Ethnic
CRT= Critical Race Theory
BTP= Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

Linguistic devices

Black = the 'b' in 'Black' has purposely been capitalised throughout the thesis (but not in quoted work) see appendix 11 on page 357

[ ] = letter or word has been added to quotation

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Research motivations and aims

The English education system is lauded as one of the best and most respected in the world. Yet, with the illusion of meritocracy at its centre, the entrenched inequalities within it are often dismissed to applaud the few that navigate it to achieve educational 'success'. To use an athletic analogy, the English education system can be viewed as a marathon because to succeed requires understanding and preparation alongside stamina and perseverance. However, while others are running a marathon, many Black women are running a 26-mile steeplechase, with limited training and water supplies (resources); jumping over multiple hurdles (racism, sexism, classism); as well as devising unconventional strategies to overcome other unexpected barriers that may emerge. Therefore, it is truly a complex and tiring feat for this group to complete the 'education steeplechase' to become graduates.

Black British women are constantly overlooked by the research community- despite unfavourable evidence that consistently shows that, even though as a group they invest heavily in education, this investment is not reflected in their outcomes (Mirza, 1986; 1992, 2006, 2008; Advance HE, 2018; Gov.uk, 2018a; Gov.uk, 2019a). Thus, this thesis is borne out of a desire to explore, document and ultimately understand how Black British girls navigate through the English education system, through a critical analysis of their educational journeys- from primary school to university.

Inspired by Mirza's 1992 groundbreaking book *Young, Female and Black* which foregrounded the educational experiences of young, second-generation, Black British Caribbean women, this thesis continues to critically examine and share the

perceptions of Black British women in the education system. In this way, more than 25 years since the publication of *Young, Female and Black*, the 25 Black British women graduates within this study represent the next generation of young women who have continued to find ingenious ways to navigate through a complex and unequal education system.

Research questions

This study seeks to answer the following overarching research question:

What are the educational journeys and experiences of Black British women graduates?

More specifically, it will explore and also answer:

a. What are the characteristics of the educational journeys of Black British women graduates and what are the key decisions and choices that have shaped their journeys?
b. What were the roles of the family and extended networks in shaping these educational journeys and experiences?
c. What roles did ethnicity, cultural background and social class (along with race and gender) play in mediating the aspirations, strategies and decision-making of Black British women graduates throughout their educational journeys?

Having outlined the research motivations, aims and the research questions, the next section will centre my own educational journey, using autoethnography, to situate myself in this research.

Being my authentic (Black) self and journeying through the (white) education system

According to Nadar (2014:20), "the identity of the researcher is as important as the participants in the research," therefore, by using autoethnography it enables me to bring forth who I am and thus what I bring to the research through my own educational story. Moreover, as Berry and Patti (2015: 266) state, the value of such an approach is in how "autoethnographers vulnerably lay ourselves bare and at the service of something bigger- [sharing] unique and often overlooked understanding[s] concerning the complex problems that riddle communicative worlds." Likewise, as this thesis has a relativist ontological stance and is grounded in Black Feminist epistemology[1], autoethnography works well as it is "positioned to embrace subjectivity, engage in critical self-reflexivity, speak rather than being spoken for, interrogate power and resist oppression," (Griffin, 2012: 142). Additionally, and in line with Critical Race Theory (CRT)[2], autoethnography facilitates the employment of my experiential knowledge to 'speak back' to the dominant (white) majoritarian story (Solarzano and Yosso, 2002).

[1] Both Relativist ontology and Black Feminist epistemology are discussed in chapter 4
[2] One of the theoretical frameworks engaged with in this study and discussed in chapter 2

Knowledge of self and my Black identity

I remember vividly, at the age of 4, announcing to my mother that I had decided that I was going to dress up as a *Black* Barbie for a friend's costume party. She obliged and helped me to prepare my costume. I remember at the party beaming with pride as I told anyone that would listen that I had not just come dressed up as Barbie, I had come as *Black* Barbie. I share this memory to illustrate the sense of pride in my Black identity that my parents had instilled within me and how I had displayed it by using a costume to signal and perform my gendered and racial identity at a very young age (Thomas and Hacker, 2011, Clammer, 2015). Looking back, it was this sense of pride that provided me with solace, confidence and resilience - regardless of how white the space was- throughout my educational journey (Miller and MacIntosh, 1999; Butler-Barnes et al, 2018).

Parents play significant roles in the upbringing of a child and my parents were no exception. For as long as I can remember, they made sure that me and my sister were exposed to different extra-curricular educational, cultural and creative activities so that we quickly became familiar with children from a wide range of backgrounds as well as diverse spaces and places (Lareau, 2002; Vincent et al, 2012a). While my parents had modest incomes, through their extensive knowledge, interests, experiences and aspirations, they prioritised providing me and my sister with many opportunities to explore ourselves, our communities and our society so that we were able to locate ourselves within wider British society and be comfortable (Ajegbo et al, 2007: 23). Despite notions that *There ain't no Black in the Union Jack*[3], my upbringing fostered an awareness and pride in my Britishness, fused with the rich, vibrant and

[3] A book by Gilroy (1987)

powerful cultures of Nigeria and Jamaica, as well as a sense of belonging in the British Isles as much as anyone else did (Rattansi, 2000; Reynolds, 2006; Neegan, 2008; Lam and Smith, 2009). The proverb 'knowledge is power' underpinned the love that I had for learning, as well as how education in all its forms were central within my household. This reinforced the excitement I felt to enter into the education system.

Navigating and finding my space

Influenced by her own educational experiences in the English education system, my mother was the architect of my educational journey where she desired for me to follow an academic route at the "appropriate educational age-stage" (Hamilton, 2018: 5); and she supported me vehemently at every step of the way (Vincent et al, 2012b; Rollock et al, 2015). She was adamant that me and my sister would attend academically-selective schools- preferably private or grammar- because she was aware of the opportunities that such schools could provide and, she would always explain to me: "That is where the future leaders, managers and entrepreneurs go!" (Gerwitz et al, 1994; Bodovski, 2010; Brown, 2013)[4]. This pursuit of quality education led to my movement and participation in several different educational institutions, in both the private and state sector, at primary and secondary level. Within these experiences, my Black identity intersecting with my social class, gender, ethnicity and cultural background became prominent in educational institutions where I was one of the only Black students, as well as in educational institutions where I was one of many Black students. Different challenges emerged like my lack of access to the same

[4] Please note that I am aware of my relative privilege regarding my educational journey and experiences. Such privileges included having knowledgeable parents as well as access to resources that others may not have had which helped me to navigate within the education system in the ways that I have.

privileges that my white peers at my elite private boarding school had (Maxwell and Aggleton, 2014), or the questioning by my Black peers of my authenticity as a 'real' Black girl at my inner-city state school (Harris and Khanna, 2010; Muhammad and MacArthur, 2015).

However, regardless of the type of school that I attended, I recall the lack of diversity in staff backgrounds and the curriculum which contradicted with my upbringing, and I became increasingly frustrated about it (Haddix, 2012; Gray et al, 2018). One of the other secondary schools that I attended was situated in the suburbs of London and was predominantly white and working-class. Here, as a student, I often experienced racial slurs and had to defend myself against my peers and teachers alike (Rollock, 2012; Chapman and Bhopal, 2019). For one of my GCSE subjects, I chose history because I craved being able to engage with other cultures, contributions and stories of people like myself, and I naively thought I would be able to gain this here. However, as a class, we were only taught about Black people in a limited capacity - particularly in the US, regarding slavery and the civil rights movement (Doharty, 2018; Harris and Reynolds, 2014). I remember challenging the teacher- who didn't have the knowledge, interest or tools to do so - about why he didn't highlight the experiences of Black British people (Picower, 2009; Cui, 2017; Alexander and Bernard-Weekes, 2017). I didn't understand why we were only learning about the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott in the US and not about the 1963 Bristol bus boycott in the UK; I didn't understand why the Black Panther organisation were depicted as terrorists confined to US contexts and not about their social justice aims and their global presence which included their chapters in London (BBC, 2019b).

It was not until I attended college that, at the age of 17, during the second year of my A-Level studies in my sociology classes, my teacher introduced us to the canon

of Black feminism and more specifically, research that was written by and centred Black British experiences. I remember being astonished because for the first time in an academic setting, I was able to see that Black British people could be both the author and subject of research, and from that moment, I too desired to create such knowledge (Kennedy-Macfoy, 2013, Rollock, 2013). Although I had not decided on pursuing a career in academia at that point, I went on to study sociology at university where I was able to strengthen my understandings and find the tools to articulate the mechanisms operating within society, as well as how to channel my passion about Black identities in constructive ways (hooks, 1994; Maylor, 2009a; Roberts 2013). It is necessary to add that alongside and within my formal education, from secondary school onwards, I was always actively engaged in leading, organising and participating in activities and events that empowered, enhanced or re-centred Black identities within the space. By doing these additional actions, I was able to preserve my Black identity and pride while simultaneously filling the voids and lessening the disconnect I constantly felt as a young Black British girl/woman navigating and progressing through the (white) education system (Terhune, 2008, Payne and Suddler, 2014).

As is evident from the brief account of myself and my educational journey, my Black identity has played a significant role in informing my practice. It has also provided me with confidence and resilience, motivating me in ways that have enabled me to carve out spaces within educational institutions to insert my Blackness and those of others[5]. These personal experiences and my reflections of my educational journey provides the basis of this thesis and my desire to "use my access to class and academic privilege to advocate for women who look like me to have access to

[5] In chapter 4, I continue being reflexive about my identity throughout the research process of this study

voice…in the pursuit of being and becoming a Black woman intellectual," (Griffin, 2012: 142).

Thesis structure

The chapter that follows sets out the conceptual framework that critically engages with the meanings and understandings of the concepts that are central within this thesis. It comprises of expanding the boundaries of Black identities by situating it in relation to intellectual debates around race, ethnicity, culture as well as Britishness. It acknowledges gender and specifically how Black women are positioned within UK discourses, along with what is meant by 'graduates' and social class. The chapter ends by presenting the intersectional approach of this thesis, achieved by combining theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice.

The third chapter engages empirical research illustrating the role of race, gender and class in education, the whiteness of educational institutions and the implications of this, alongside understandings about educational 'success'. It concludes by locating this research and how it builds on the existing literature.

Within chapter 4, the methodology is presented to illustrate the processes that were undertaken to conduct this study including: sampling and recruitment, introducing the 25 participants, data collection and analysis, as well as reflexive and ethical considerations.

Next, chapter 5 introduces the first of the 3 findings chapters and closely connects to chapter 2's conceptual framework to expand the boundaries of Black British women's identities through analysing whiteness, the diversity within Blackness, class and gender as expressed by participants.

In chapter 6, differences in accessibility and the kinds of barriers in educational experiences and journeys, based upon “being the only one” or ‘being one of many’ within different educational institutions are examined.

In the last findings chapter, chapter 7 demonstrates how the pursuit of education is linked to obligations to self, family and wider communities. It also demonstrates how the English education system can be a site of personal struggle, overcome through a commitment to education illustrated by the development of strategies to overcome these. Moreover, this chapter ends by asserting the limitations of understandings of educational ‘success’.

Finally, the conclusions and recommendations that emerge from this study are detailed in Chapter 8, where the research motivations and aims are re-addressed, the research findings summarised to answer the research questions, and the significant contributions to knowledge are identified. The chapter also discusses the research limitations and future research directions and ways the findings can be communicated to the targeted audience. Lastly, specific recommendations to key stakeholders are provided to better support the learning experiences of Black British girls and young women.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUALLY SITUATING BLACK BRITISH WOMEN GRADUATES

Introduction

It is the intention within this chapter, to examine and highlight the salient constructions of Black British women graduates as a group as these appear in the existing literature. This will guide my approach to my own emerging empirical findings which will be interrogated in relation to this existing literature. In this way, my engagement with existing literature will "accentuate the reasons why [my]…research topic is worth studying, the assumptions of…[me as the] researcher, the scholars…[I] agree with and disagree with and how…[I] conceptually ground…[my] approach," (Adom et al, 2018: 439).

This chapter is divided into two sections to lay out the conceptual underpinnings by examining identity categories pertinent to the analysis of this study. The first section begins by considering gender and specifically how Black women are depicted in mainstream UK popular discourses[6]. Secondly, the discussion leads onto what is meant by 'Black' and 'British' identities according to how these terms are constructed in theoretical literature. Next, generic understandings about graduate identities and whether they are sufficient to employ when researching groups like Black British women graduates will be explored. This is followed by an examination of the role of social class in relation to race, thus concluding the first section.

In the second section, I illustrate how I combine the conceptual underpinnings with the theoretical framework by first introducing my intersectional approach which is crucial to articulate the nuanced identities of the sample. Secondly, I elucidate the

[6] Chapter 3 will address the depiction of Black girls and women within British academic discourses

theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Bourdieu's theory of Practice (BTP) that I employ. Lastly, I demonstrate why these frameworks adequately assist in reconstructing the educational experiences and journeys of Black British women graduates.

Section One

Depictions of Black Women

In public discourses, the concept of 'gender' and 'sex' tend to be conflated. In addition, 'gender' and 'sex' have typically been conceptualised as binary. However, these binary categories are being challenged and with a greater recognition of gender fluidity than has been in the past (Connell, 1987; Delphy, 1993; Paechter, 2006; Carrera et al, 2012; Knight, 2014; Conlin et al, 2019). In groundbreaking work by Butler (1990), she put forward her theory of gender performativity which argues against the ideas that conflate both sex with gender with intrinsic essence. Rather, Butler argues that individuals are engaged in performances of gender identities through everyday actions, speech and dress. Drawing on Foucault's concept of discourse, Butler shows how these practices are made meaningful through discourses – both sex and gender are discursive constructs embedded with social, historical and political underpinnings. Butler's theory is insightful because she is asserting that individuals become who they are by what they do and how they are positioned within discursive frameworks. Extending Butler's theory in educational contexts, Youdell (2011: 74) contends that individuals perform in ways that are bound by external and internal factors where:

> "the identifications and recognitions that are intrinsic to processes of subjectivation are made available both by the educational discourses that frame

schooling and by those wider discourses that permeate school, circulate inside it and are deployed and foreclosed through the practice of institutions, teachers and students."

It is also interesting when thinking about both gender and race in relation to Black women as students because it highlights how groups or individuals are constrained into fixed ways of being because of the way that they look and then 'perform' their identities. Fulcher and Scott (2011: 151) define gender as the:

> "differences in the way that men and women in a particular society are expected to feel, think, and behave. Thus males are typically expected to feel, think, and behave in a *masculine* way, and females in a *feminine* way." [emphasis in original]

These expectations of how different genders should act can be seen for example, with ideas that all men are rational; and on the contrary, that all women are emotional (Fischer, 1993; Hellum and Oláh, 2019). The main and fundamental aim of feminism is to eradicate inequalities between men and women and there are different types of feminism[7] which seek to achieve this aim through various methods. What is apparent is that not all women around the world and in the same societies experience gendered oppression in the same way which calls for the basis of such analysis and struggles to consider the heterogeneity of the category 'women' (Mohanty, 2000). The writing of Lorde (1984) calls out the need for an inclusive feminism that directly draws upon the experiences of Black, 'third world' and Lesbian women.[8] As feminism is not present within a vacuum, it will be influenced by societal and global phenomena such as racism and its legacies such as colonialism (Ware, 1996; Lewis and Mills, 2003), as well as the geographical location it is being practiced within (Mirza, 1997; Davis

[7] Different types of feminisms include Liberal, Radical, Marxist/Socialist, Post-colonial and Black- just to name a few.
[8] There are also calls to include transgendered and transsexual women within feminism (Heyes, 2003)

and Evans, 2011). Due to the purpose of my research and when considering Black women within the realms of gender (and feminism), it is impossible to view their gendered and raced identities as separate axes as they are inextricably connected (Carby, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2009). To illustrate, I draw on British depictions of Black women to communicate this.

Black Women's Invisibility in Britain

Although there has been previous research dedicated to Black British women (Bryan et al, 1985, Osler, 1989; Mirza, 1992, 2008; Gabriel, 2016), its volume is limited when compared to Black boys and men specifically within education (Sewell, 1997; Odih, 2002; Byfield, 2008; Law et al, 2012; Lindsay & Muljs, 2007; Wright et al, 2016). For Mirza (1997:4), the invisibility which engulfs Black British women can be attributed to:

> "the separate narrative constructions of race, gender and class: in a racial discourse, where the subject is male; in a gendered discourse, where the subject is white; and a class discourse, where race has no place. It is because of these ideological blind spots that black women occupy a most critical place- a location whose very nature resists telling. In this critical space, we can imagine questions that could not have been imagined before; we can ask questions that might not have been asked before."

In this regard, Mirza asserts that the multiple, overlapping and devalued identities that Black women occupy are complex and disrupt the single and set ways that particular social constructs such as race, gender and class are understood. However, Mirza also maintains that ignoring the experiences of Black women is a

disservice, as their multiple identities means that they have unique insights which can contribute a great deal to existing understandings of the lived experiences of various social groups. This also highlights the importance of intersectionality (to be discussed in later sections) within research about Black women. Much of the discord within mainstream feminism - which is deemed to centre white middle-class women's experiences - is the failure to acknowledge the intersections of other oppressions experienced by Black and otherwise racially minoritised women (Carby, 1997; Breines, 2007; Lawrence, 2017).

In an article titled *Who Stole all the Black Women from Britain?,* Dabiri (2013) highlights the lack of representation or indeed, the deliberate erasure of Black women in *Black* British mainstream culture which she writes is dominated by Black men coupled with white women. This illustrates the extent of the situation as it raises questions about where Black British women can find safe spaces to exist if they are excluded from cultures and spaces which are supposed to be their own. Yet, these Black British mainstream spaces are extensions of racist, patriarchal societies that function to marginalise Black women[9]. Therefore, it is not surprising that their invisibility permeates into other *whiter* areas of society and institutions. However, rapid technological advancement has meant that there has been a rise in the creation of platforms, albeit from the margins, that represent diverse experiences of Black British women (Wilson-Ojo, 2017). Unlike former times, the power to create content does not lie solely in the hands of a select few. This is reflected in media outlets that seek to provide insight into the additional issues that Black British women encounter (Bradbury, 2013, Popoola, 2016, Flash, 2016, National Union of Journalists Scotland,

[9] see US studies that have previously identified this: Ransby and Matthews (1993); Saint-Auburn (1994); Burgess (1996); Ladson-Billings (2009); Bailey and Trudy (2018)

2017). This re-centring of Black women within spaces and places[10] created *by* Black women for other Black women in British society are a small number of growing examples that actively redress the group's established invisibility within mainstream British discourse- and are foundational to Black Feminist epistemology[11]. Moreover, in an important exhibition organised by the Black Cultural Archives (BCA) in 2014, it documented the long history of different Black British women throughout the centuries, presenting much needed representation and aptly titled: *Re-imagine: Black Women in Britain.*

The invisibility of Black women in British popular media and culture along with limited educational research shows a significant gap in knowledge, and in particular the lived experiences of Black girls and women. Therefore, detailed academic research about this group is necessary as the invisibility of Black British women is damaging as it can have far-reaching and psychological consequences - particularly for young Black British girls growing up. If individuals or groups rarely see meaningful reflections of themselves, it can impact on their perceived standards of beauty (Weekes, 1997) and the development of their gendered and racial identities (Yancy, 2000; Weekes, 2003; Thomas and Hacker, 2011). Moreover, knowledge production by those who are marginalised recognises the affective/emotional aspect of knowledge production which has been neglected and not recognised; and through the production of knowledge, marginalised people make themselves visible and therefore have the power to challenge existing knowledge as well as producing new knowledge (Kiwan, 2017, Doharty, 2019).

[10] Channels like Black Ballad, No Fly on the WALL., gal-dem, IshapebeautyTV, Black British Girlhood, Project Embrace and Black Girl Festival are some platforms currently making visible and showcasing the diversity of Black British women
[11] To be discussed in chapter 4

Expanding the boundaries of Black identities[12]

Within this section, a definition of what is meant by 'Black' in regard to the research sample will be developed. To do so, Black identities will be explored as a label, in relation to British identities and finally, with emphasis on particular contexts and histories embedded within the term.

Black Identity

The term 'Black' is a racialised label, a source of identification and a signifier representing vast ethnicities and cultures - its usage has a complex past as well as multiple meanings (Maylor, 2009b: 370). According to Alexander (2018) the term 'Black' should be understood as a disputed and ever-changing label, dependent on specific times and spaces. She posits that 'Black' has been constructed in two pronounced stages in British society. The first was from the 1960s to the mid-1980s where it was a "political stance, and represents a coalition of groups and concerns," (ibid: 5) - in other words: Political Blackness. The second stage started in the mid-1980s until the very early 2000s which she characterises as "privileg[ing] identity, and…the fracturing of this coalition around questions of ethnicity and later religion," (ibid: 5). My research contributes to the development of 'Black' as a label beyond the second stage of Alexander's theorisations in the very early 2000s. In the U.S., Harris and Khanna (2010) have contributed to similar debates taking place there around what 'Black' is but also what it means to be 'Black' within the Black community itself. Their

[12] In this section I use 'Black diaspora' and 'African diaspora' interchangeably

study focused on displaying the diversity within American Black communities and the levels of group cohesion by interviewing middle-class Black people as well as biracial people (those with one Black parent and one white parent). They reported that due to 'authentic' ideas of Blackness such as prerequisites of being working-class and having darker skin tones, the groups that they interviewed were deemed to sit outside of these perimeters and thus these narrow constructions of Blackness were being contested and renegotiated by these members of the group. Very similar findings have previously been identified in Britain by Tate (2005: 104) who interviewed Black women and highlighted how closely Blackness was embedded to identity which is "deconstructed and reassembled differently through the translation of the tropes of 'community', 'culture', 'shade', 'belonging' and 'consciousness'".

The research by Alexander (2018), Harris and Khanna (2010) and Tate (2005) highlight focal parts of the discussions around 'Black', specifically how it has evolved to represent a particular group and the heterogeneity of those that identify as 'Black'. Within the following extract, Alexander's characterisation of Political Blackness builds on the previous observations of Hall (2000). He previously described how 'Black' was a collective term employed to delineate the shared history of oppression and racism that communities of colour who had migrated from the commonwealth[13] to Britain from the late 1940s experienced:

> "people of diverse societies and cultures would all come to Britain in the fifties and sixties as part of that huge wave of migration from the Caribbean, East Africa, the Asian subcontinent, Pakistan, Bangladesh, from different parts of India, and all identified themselves politically as Black. What they said was, "We may be different in actual colour skins but vis-a-vis the social system, vis-a-vis

[13] The Commonwealth is one of the world's oldest political association of states. Its roots go back to the British Empire when some countries were ruled directly or indirectly by Britain. Some of these countries became self-governing while retaining Britain's monarch as Head of State. They formed the British Commonwealth of Nations. (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2019)

the political system of racism, there is more that unites us than what divides us," (Hall, 2000: 150).

In this way, 'Black' became a widely used category, creating a sense of solidarity and strength among Asian, African, Caribbean and other visibly 'different' groups of colour against racist treatment in British society (Swaby, 2014). While there are merits to its usage as a way to represent a range of people under a common goal of equality and justice, as a term it has been found to be problematic and it is no longer widely used in this way[14]. One reason is that within the UK's 1991 census, ethnicity-based questions were first introduced which contributed to the erosion of Political Blackness. This divided ethnic minority groups into smaller categories such as "Black African, Black Caribbean, Black-Other, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and Any other ethnic group," (Aspinall, 2011: 35). Political Blackness has also been problematised for ignoring the differing experiences of the many groups encompassed under it, for example South Asians (Hazareesingh, 1986; Modood, 1988; Modood,1994), and for sidelining the identities, histories and struggles of people of the African diaspora (Andrews, 2016). There were also some groups who did not identify themselves under Political Blackness at all (Hall, 2000, Brah 2000).

The second way that 'Black' has been perceived is to demarcate people with origins in Sub-Saharan Africa and the wider African diaspora. This most recent shift in understanding can be attributed to the rise of the Black Power movement in 1970s US contexts which spread throughout the diaspora. This movement reclaimed 'Black' as

[14] On the other hand, it can be said that even though Political Blackness is no longer widely referenced, its basis can be seen to have morphed into other collective terminologies such as ethnic minority, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME); Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and people of colour (POC). These terms are also not without contention (Okolosie et al, 2015; Newland et al, 2016; Elliot-Cooper et al, 2016; Sandhu, 2018). In addition, the National Union of Students (NUS) still upholds Political Blackness in its remit of representing the needs of 'Black' students who they define as those "of African, Asian, Arab and Caribbean descent" (NUS, 2017).

beautiful creating much needed racial pride amongst African-Americans (Carson, 1995). It became one approach to:

> "define and encourage a new consciousness among black people…a consciousness that might be called a sense of peoplehood: pride rather than shame, in blackness, and an attitude of brotherly communal responsibility among all black people for one another," (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967:12).

The movement's influence was felt in Britain where many people of the African diaspora increasingly started to also identify as 'Black'. Currently, 'Black' is used almost exclusively to describe people of the African diaspora- particularly in Britain and the US. Yet, 'Black' used in this manner to describe the African diaspora is also opposed by some. One such opposition is that it essentialises and homogenises the diverse experiences and histories of the many Black groups in Africa and its diaspora (Brah, 2000, Aspinall, 2011; Wright, 2015). Moreover, the binary nature of its usage is discussed by Tsri (2016:151) who argued against the use of 'Black' for African people and the diaspora citing how there remains a:

> "strong relationship that was and is still established between the symbolic and categorical use of the term 'black', and the contribution this relationship makes to privileging those who are labelled white and those oppressing those labelled black…Furthermore, the use of the term 'black' as a human categorising device is an imposition of a definition by another group, a dominant group, on another."

This argument had been supported by Rassool (1997:191) who called attention to these same points and the need for "both personal and political agency" which she feels can be achieved by the process of self-identification and self-definition. Also, Wright (2015: 3) noted that there are dominant constructions of Blackness exemplified by African-Americans in popular discourse which she attributes to "unequal

representation of Black collectives in discourses of Blackness generally," that unfortunately leads to "some groups enjoy[ing] being understood as Black, whereas others have to struggle to clamour for recognition". The broadness of the term 'Black' in Britain is also evidenced by the fact that at times, it embraces those of mixed-race heritage too[15].

While I acknowledge the problems in using the term 'Black', it is a widely used and established label delineating a particular group into which my sample fits. Furthermore, as the term 'Black' has largely been reclaimed (Andrews, 2016), it can be viewed as a liberatory tool used by a group of people who have survived against the odds - through slavery, colonialism and systematic oppression. Hall (2000: 149) contributed a perfect example of my thought process:

> "We said, "You have spent five, six, seven hundred years elaborating the symbolism through which Black is a negative factor. Now I don't want another term. I want that term, the negative one, that's the one I want. I want a piece of that action. I want to take it out of the way in which it has been articulated in religious discourses, in visual discourse. I want to pluck it out of its articulation and rearticulate it in a new way."

While Hall's assertions were made nearly two decades ago, as will be evidenced in later sections, processes of the re-articulation of 'Black' are still occurring at present, and such topics have extended beyond the academy[16] where there are many discussions about the importance of recovering the term 'Black' from its negative connotations. In my research, I attempt to mediate the issues surrounding 'Black' with

[15] Although, the numbers of people of mixed race are rising significantly and there are many studies which call for there to be more consideration and separate categories for mixed-race identities (Ifekwunigwe, 2004; Ali, 2003; Tru, 2009; Song, 2015).
[16] Beyond the academy, the case for self-identification is pushed by Ashamu (2017) when she makes it clear that:
"It is important that the black community does not base their identity on the societal expectations of what black is. Being black is grounded in much more than our physical appearance and stereotypes, we cannot let others define what it means to be black…To be black is an emotive concept, something you feel not what people perceive you to be. I am not black simply because I look in the mirror and see dark skin, my identity as a black woman is also a manifestation of the shared experiences between myself and my ancestors."

the employment of appropriate theoretical frameworks, detailed consideration and clear explanations of why and how such labels are used. 'Black' in this research will be used in connection to the latter understandings stated by Carmichael and Hamilton (1967), Carson (1995) and Andrews (2016) to represent women of sub-Saharan African descent by way of the African continent, the Caribbean and elsewhere who were born and/or reside in England. This reflects the categories for 'Black' in the UK Census which comprises of Black African, Black Caribbean and Any other Black background (Office for National Statistics, 2015:8). Being mindful of the debates surrounding the importance of being able to name one's Blackness and control how it is depicted (Marsh, 2013), as will be clear in chapter 4, the women in this study self-define themselves in terms of their race, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds. These self-definitions also reflected the diversity amongst the Black group, as well as how this plays out within the education system (Ogbu, 1993; Robinson-Wood, 2009). In this regard, employing intersectionality (discussed in detail later in the chapter) is significant in order to sufficiently articulate such nuanced realities.

*Black **and** British identities*

In 1992, Hall (1992: 111) had already proclaimed that it was about time that Black and British identities were adopted by Black people in Britain as he reasoned that:

> "blacks in the British diaspora must, at this historical moment, refuse the binary black or British. They must refuse it because the "or" remains the sight of *constant contestation* when the aim of the struggle must be, instead to replace the "or" with the potentiality or the possibility of an "and."" [emphasis in original].

In this way, Hall suggested that being Black and British reflects a sense and experience of belonging that Black people living in Britain are justified to feel and have. It also emphasises the fact that just because an individual is Black, it does not make them any less British than a white person[17]. Mirza (1997) points out that there has often - similarly to English identity- been a tendency to equate British identity to whiteness which excludes Black people from the idea of British identity. Yet, being both Black and British can be viewed as the epitome of hybrid identities and the syncretism of cultures (Nagel, 1994; Gilroy, 2000; Plaza 2006; Reynolds, 2006; Lam and Smith, 2009). It is an inevitable product of Black diaspora communities who have settled in Britain, produced within a particular 'diasporic space' (Brah, 2003). This has been central within much of Gilroy's (1993:1) work when he wrote about such cultures coming together:

> "The contemporary black English, like the Anglo-Africans of earlier generations and perhaps, like all blacks in the West, stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages, both of which have mutated through the course of the modern world that formed them and assumed new configurations."

However, it must be noted that rarely are 'Black' and 'English' used in partnership as a form of identification as Gilroy has within the previous quote compared to the more normalised 'Black and British'- even if a Black person is born and raised in England. Rattansi (2000: 120) explains why this is the case when he notes that for both Black and Asian individuals (and their descendants) "feelings of rejection or grudging and conditional acceptance abound, sometimes captured in the view that while black and Asian people can be *British,* lack of *whiteness* poses

[17] Similar to my own socialisation as shared in chapter 1

insuperable barriers to being English, Scottish or Welsh," [emphasis in original]. Moreover, the colonial legacies of Britain also play a role in the uncommonness of a 'Black and English' identity as Hall (1996: 67) reminds us that "while Britain has always been a multi-ethnic nation," due to its many colonies across the world, "the hegemony of England has signified the historic marginalisation of the 'Celtic fringes'".

At present, an identity of 'Black and British' is widely accepted in British popular culture. This is evident from the BBC's *Black and British* season in 2016 and *Alt History: Black to Life* series (2019a) which celebrated and illustrated to the British populace the contributions, cultures and long presence of Black people in Britain. Through a range of programmes, it showcased the blending of British, Caribbean and African heritages, forming a distinct and rich 'Black and British' identity. This strengthens what Gilroy (1987: 155) boldly contended over 30 years ago that the very presence of the significant amount of Black people in Britain "redefines the meaning of the term" 'British'. Yet, contemporary writers such as Eddo-Lodge (2017), Hirsch (2018) and Adegoke and Uvibenené (2018) continue to show the ways in which anti-black racism is very much alive and kicking in modern day Britain and *still* excludes Black people from feelings of true belonging here[18].

*Black **and** British but **also**…*

Black and British identities have been shaped by the cultures of the many Black diaspora communities originating from Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas which have fused with Britishness (Gilroy, 1993; Andrews and Palmer; 2016). Brah (2003: 616) explains that "diasporic journeys are essentially settling down, about putting roots

[18] The Windrush Scandal in 2012 is a prime example of such feelings where despite established connections due to the commonwealth where Black people were always 'British',"despite living and working in the UK for decades [Black Caribbeans] have been told they are living here illegally because of a lack of official paperwork," (McDowell, 2018)

‘elsewhere’,” and therefore the results from this is an emergence of a mixture of cultures, passed down within the diasporic community as well as with the ones in the host society. She posits that the existence of diasporic communities challenges the fixed notions of borders and the politics of location as such communities transcend these. She introduced the concept of ‘diaspora space’ as “the site where *the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native,”* [empahsis in original] (ibid, 632). Meaning that new hybrid cultures are manifested in a collective re-negotiation of cultural identity in the chosen society when different diaspora communities as well as the natives live together over time and mix. In effect, this space represents how interconnected different elements of various cultures become once they unite and the power and beauty in this process. Following on from this, Gilroy (2000) reflects on a similar occurrence that he identifies within Black diaspora communities, which as he notes are vast and diverse. He suggests that diaspora identification within these communities have been sources of resistance stemming from the historical legacies of racial dominance. Through the production of music in various genres, it evidences innovation as well as the formation of syncretic cultures that bring together the Black diaspora as well as the countries, they currently reside in. Similarly, Tate (2005: 104) details how Black identities are formed and negotiated by Black women in their discussions which she refers to as ‘hybridity-of-the-everyday’ where “the use of speaking back and identity re-positioning…produces different, hybrid identities within the third space of talk”. Neegan (2008), reflects on her own personal and complex journey constructing her cultural identity which has many influences stemming from being a member of the wider African diaspora, her Jamaican heritage (and her time spent living in Jamaica) alongside her current residence in Canada. She explores the specificity of the different cultures that she has been exposed to and how there are

similarities e.g. the racialised discourses in both Jamaican and Canadian society, as well as how she is able to 'awaken' from these to understand the historical basis to decolonise her mind and relate more closely to her African ancestry. In a similar way to Brah's (2003) theory, while Neegan may have encountered the 'diaspora space', she eventually chooses to assert her African cultural identity which resonates as an act of resistance to which Gilroy (2000) refers.

'Black' identities have also shifted in the specification of identification where geographical location distinctions and the heritages of parents and grandparents play an important factor in the identities of current Black and British people (Rattansi, 2000; Alexander, 1996: 59-61; Lam & Smith 2009). As Aspinall (2011) acknowledges, "it is necessary to consider class, culture, and gender and their complex intersectionalities with race and ethnicity," which should also be the case for considerations of Black Britishness. However, there are often dominant cultures and ethnicities of the many Black communities which come to represent what it means to be both Black (Wright, 2015: 13) and British, sidelining others. In Britain, it is Caribbean and especially Jamaican culture which- up until recently, has dominated. This is expressed well by Bakare-Yusuf (1997: 81) who accounted for this by saying:

> "The patterns of migration and the timing of various waves of immigration into Britain have resulted in a hegemony of Caribbean culture in general, and Jamaican culture in particular. It is the under-class and working-class Jamaican cultural practices which are called to speak for and represent the cultural taste of all of Britain's blacks".

This has also been noted by Lewis (2004) who recognised the Jamaican influence on both Black Britain and the African Diaspora at large. Furthermore, Lam and Smith (2009: 1251) also asserted the longer settlement of Caribbeans as an

important factor for this. The accounts of Bakare-Yusuf (1997), Lewis and Lam (2009) and Smith (2009) all touch upon the migration histories of Caribbean communities and Jamaicans in particular that assisted in these groups becoming synonymous with Black Britishness in postwar Britain and the dominance and legacy of these cultures here. While it is important to note this history, it must also be noted that "constructing a notion of a collective black community as though untouched by difference or internal contradiction has the effect of homogenising the expressive cultures of the various black groups in Britain," (Bakare-Yusuf, 1997: 81). Moreover, changes in demographics must be reflected upon where in the 2011 British census, the "Black British African/Black African" group are now numerically the dominant Black group[19]. Adding to this and fueled by the second generation[20] of Black British young people of African heritage[21], there is visible shaping, influencing and assertions of African heritages alongside Blackness and Britishness. This is especially noticeable with the rise and popularity in music genres like Afrobeats (Hancox, 2012; Channel 4, 2017). Yet, this process of asserting ethnicity and cultural heritage alongside Blackness/Britishness is an inevitable process which occurred for previous generations of Black Caribbean youth, as articulated by Hall (2000: 152) in his work:

> *"*Third generation young Black men and women know they come from the Caribbean, know they are Black, know that they are British. They want to speak from all three identities. They are not prepared to give up any one of them. They will contest the Thatcherite notion of Englishness, because they say this Englishness is Black. They will contest the notion of Blackness because they want to make a differentiation between people who are Black from one kind of society and people who are Black from another…They are all those identities together."

[19] this is continental and not specific to islands
[20] people "either born here [UK] or brought from the mother country at an early age," (Child, 1943: 3)
[21] even though there has been a long presence of West African groups in Britain (Adi, 1998)

In research by Lam and Smith (2009: 1264), they observe similar occurrences to Hall where they found that “a more British-or English-based Caribbean identity might be fostered as adolescents develop ethnic knowledge and belonging within such contexts.” Based on the development of Black British identities that include strong identifications with familial origins, I put forward that any research focusing upon Black British groups in 2019 and beyond needs to draw upon such influences and considerations of ethnicity and cultural background to truly represent the diversity within this group. In addition, it has been shown that there are differing experiences and outcomes amongst ethnically and culturally different Black British groups in spite of their shared racialised Black identities (Lam and Smith, 2009; The Economist, 2016; Owusu-Kwarteng, 2017).

In order to avoid essentialising the educational journeys and experiences of Black British women, I have made an effort to incorporate exploration into both their raced identity as both Black and British, but also their varied ethnicity and cultural identities. In this way, I have attempted to delve into nuances within the group’s identities. What’s more, by employing particular frameworks such as Black Feminist epistemology (discussed in chapter 4) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) (discussed later in this chapter), I analyse the contexts in which labels relating to race, ethnicity and gender are ascribed to individuals and groups as well as their impact with social class in educational contexts.

I now turn to discussing generic understandings of graduate identities and additional ways to think about them, in relation to Black women graduates moving forward.

The limits of understandings about graduate identities

British society is increasingly characterised as being a knowledge-driven economy (Castells, 1994; James et al, 2012). This is highly shaped by the acquisition of an academic degree which has become a basic requirement to obtain many jobs in the labour market. This is also the principle of human capital theory (Schultz, 1961) in which Tomlinson (2008: 50) sums up as viewing "participation in education and training as an investment that yields both social and private returns." In this way, being a graduate signifies that a person has a particular and desired set of attributes and skills (Bridgstock, 2009) as defined jointly by higher education institutions, employers and the government.

On a basic and general level, a graduate is defined by the Oxford Dictionary (2018) as "a person who has successfully completed a course of study or training, especially a person who has been awarded an undergraduate or first academic degree." While 'successfully' is open to interpretation for instance, according to the grade received, the rest of the definition in terms of obtaining an undergraduate, academic degree fits nicely into what is connoted by 'graduate' within this research. In a study conducted by Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011: 563-564), they point to wider understandings and influences upon the making of graduate identities by sharing that:

> "The concept of what a graduate is has undoubtedly been affected by the growth of higher education: a graduate is no longer drawn from a relatively narrow section of the population. Second, there is bound to be a difference of perspective in terms of what universities think they are producing and what employers expect. Finally, it seems reasonable to suppose that the very concept itself—graduate identity—is subject to interpretation, depending on employer, sector and size (at least)".

On the other hand, a graduate can be seen as a generic term that hides additional factors surrounding it. With the expansion and marketisation of higher education, it has created a competitive and hierarchal system where value as a graduate increases or decreases according to degree subject, degree grade and institution attended (Bowl, 2018), alongside individual/group identity (Archer and Hutchings 2000). Therefore, regardless of graduate status, it may not alleviate exclusions from the labour market disproportionately experienced by certain groups (Harvey et al, 1997; Carmichael and Woods, 2000). It is also important to acknowledge that a graduate identity is transitional and "can be seen as the cultural capital acquired prior to entering an organisation," (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011: 581) which replaces a previous student identity. What's more, individual and group experiences and journeys leading to becoming a graduate are important to analyse to comprehend the broad-ranging term (Reay et al, 2006, Tett, 2010; Bowl, 2001; Arbouin, 2018). This research will explore the notions of educational 'success' inherent with being a graduate in chapters 3 and 7. Doing so considers its merits when applying it to the Black British women graduates within this study. I now move on to examining the significant role of social class in this research.

The intersections of social class and race

Social class is a prominent form of stratification and identification within most Western societies. Simply put, individuals are grouped into classes with others that share comparable education and economic levels, evidenced by the possession of similar occupations, earnings and wealth. Fulcher and Scott (2011: 758) define the

main classes in Britain in a triangular model where “a small upper class stands above a larger middle class and an even larger working class.” However, these boundaries are not fixed and since the twentieth century they have varied a great deal with the rise of white-collar office-based jobs and super rich celebrities as examples, which blur class distinctions. This illustrates that class is a construct that changes according to contexts of time and place (Savage et al, 2013). Additionally, class can be ascribed, as individuals can be born into their class positions[22] or it can be achieved through obtaining educational qualifications. Much of the British population can be characterised as achieving their class positions referred to as ‘social class mobility’ in the literature (Nunn et al, 2007; Friedman et al, 2015; Goldthorpe, 2016; Social Mobility, 2017).

There has been interest in class divisions and the life chances of different class groups by different agencies in the government as well as sociologists. However, as the boundaries between each class are not fixed[23], the measuring of class has been a challenge and as such, there have been many systems developed to try to evaluate it. Currently in the UK, the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) has been the main tool that has been used since 2001 to measure class and is largely based on occupations held. In this way, it outlines many more than the 3 main classes mentioned above, instead it lists 8 categories from ‘higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations’ to ‘never worked and long-term unemployed,’ (Office for National Statistics, 2017a; Rose and Pevalin, 2003). These 8 categories also define the class of the children of individuals. However, when considering particular groups, it has been found to be an inadequate official measurement tool. In her study of Black British Caribbean girls for instance, Mirza (1992:4) found that social class

[22] The royal family are examples of this
[23] Apart from aristocracy who inherit their social class positions and titles

measurements often relied heavily on the position of the head of the household who is overwhelmingly assumed to be a man. She argued that "this was not an acceptable precedent as it offered no accurate way of measuring the social class of West Indian families which were often headed by a female *even* when a male was present," [emphasis added] (ibid: 4)[24]. Furthermore, class considerations are increasingly significant as it has been found to highly influence young people's identities and how these are formed (McCulloch et al 2007; Shildrick et al, 2009, Hollingworth, 2015), which - along with other factors - can enhance or hinder life chances for example, health (Barn and Sidhu, 2005; Bathmaker et al, 2016). Likewise, social mobility and higher socio-economic status which has often been accessible through the acquisition of educational qualifications, has largely been thwarted by person's residence in the UK[25] (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). In this way, it is evident that there are various ways of understanding social class in terms of economic, occupational, structural, status and cultural components. These are all relevant when thinking about the class positions and class identities of the Black women graduates in this study.

The establishment of class positions are often an intergenerational process. Therefore, the formation of Black middle-class identities in the UK are fairly recent and precarious as they have often been achieved within a lifetime. Moreover, the occupation of a person is a central signifier of class status but, there is often indecisiveness to claim middle-class status regardless of job title in Black communities where they are often only just beginning to develop and reflect on this particular form of identity (Rollock et al, 2011). In a study by Rollock et al (2012) exploring this, they conclude that there are different identifications to middle-classness by their Black

[24]This also draws attention to the disproportionate rates of unemployment among Black men which results in such disparities (Office for National Statistics, 2017b).
[25] This is closely influenced by class

middle-class respondents- defined so by their professional and managerial job roles. In the research, 5 main groupings were characterised as ‘comfortably middle class’, ‘middle-class ambivalent’, ‘working class with qualification’, ‘working class’ and ‘interrogators’.

When considering the way that class interacts with other axes of identity such as race, an even more complex picture emerges which often plays out more evidently within education, suggesting more nuanced inequalities (Gillborn, 2010; Vincent et al, 2013). In wider British contexts, it has been found by Dustmann at el (2010) who explored the socio-economic status of second-generation immigrants based on ethnicity, education, wages and employment that across the board, ethnic minority groups tended to be in lower positions compared to their white counterparts. However, they did account for social mobility between first- and second-generation ethnic minority groups. The establishment of class status is intergenerational and many ethnic minority groups in the UK are products of postwar migration which can attest to such disparities. Yet, it is often forgotten that in the case of Black Caribbean and Black African groups, there tends to be an assumption that they are all - and have always been - working-class which does not consider the legacies of colonialism which created highly stratified and class-based societies in the colonies. In this way, discussions around whether it is possible in the UK for Black communities to be dissociated from low- or working-class positions as well as whether Black middle-class status is an oxymoron is dependent upon how class is understood. Particularly as many Black communities experienced ‘class-downsizing’ as soon as they arrived in Britain (Rollock et al, 2015: 4). This process and the makings of Black British working-class communities is detailed in Ramdin (2017) who shows the relationship between the histories of Black people and the changing labour market needs in Britain.

On the other hand, there has been an emergence of Black middle-class groups in Britain suggesting success and progression. Interestingly though, it has been reported that whiteness is equated with middle-class status and Rattansi (2000) articulates how Black people becoming middle-class somewhat weakens perceived notions of Blackness. Additionally, it creates a fragmentation of Black communities where Gilroy (2000: 492) writes that for the Black middle-classes:

> ”its most consistent trademark is the persistent mystification of that group’s increasingly problematic relationships with a dubious entitlement to speak on behalf of the black poor who, after all, supply them with a dubious entitlement to speak on behalf of black people in general.”

Within this research, class is central along with the other facets of identity of the Black British women graduates and is crucial to understanding their educational journeys and experiences. For the most part, participants self-identify their social class positions according to how they comprehend them, based largely on their families, educations and their current professions.

Section Two

Combining conceptual underpinnings and theoretical frameworks

An Intersectional approach

Within the previous section, I conceptually located Black women at the intersections of gender and race; race and ethnicity/cultural background, and race and social class; as well as consideration of graduate categories. Therefore, it is necessary

to clarify what is meant by an intersectional approach and how I intend to practice it in this study to combine and consider how each of these identities simultaneously operate within participants' educational experiences and journeys. Berger and Guidroz (2010: 1) articulate such an approach explaining it as the focus on the application of the "race-class-gender matrix" within research to "socially locate" individuals in the context of their lived experiences to "examine how both formal and informal systems of power are deployed, maintained, and reinforced through axes of race, class and gender." Furthermore, the multiple facets that make up Black British women graduate identities within this sample are central to exploring and understanding their individual educational journeys and experiences. Intersectionality also accounts for the awareness that there is no single "Black woman" story in such a diverse group (Arya, 2012). For Windsong (2018) who engages with intersectionality in her research, she describes three main components. The first is how intersectionality enables *a move away from additive analysis* which categorises and ranks individuals' identities separately and then together to determine whether they are either privileged or oppressed. Intersectionality instead, considers how different aspects of a person's identity simultaneously work together and the real consequences throughout their lived experiences. The second component is *relationality* which concentrates on how meanings are ascribed in relation to each other. For her, intersectionality in research is an "analytic framework [which] shifts away from a sole focus on oppression and directs researchers to take a relationality perspective that examines both privilege and oppression," (ibid: 137). The third component she posits is the role of *social constructionism* which is the notion that race, and gender are socially constructed by power and dominance, but are not fixed nor biological. Windsong notes that intersectionality upholds social constructionism by acknowledging other forms of

social identity such as social class, nationality and ability which may influence how gender and race are experienced, the fact that there is no one way to encounter gender and race and also it recognises how not all social identities are salient in some contexts (ibid: 137). In this research, these overlapping, multiple and interlinking identities are reflected and analysed appropriately with an intersectional approach by the merging of distinct but equally useful theoretical frameworks.

Imbued within an intersectional approach is the concept of intersectionality coined by Crenshaw (1989; 1991: 1241) to articulate how: "race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political and representational aspects of violence against women of color". Crenshaw demonstrates this in the ways that- especially within the labour market and the US justice system- identities are viewed in single and fixed categories which are not inclusive to women of colour who have multiple, interlinking and subjugated raced and gendered identities (Crenshaw,1989). This was evidenced in the exclusions felt by Black women within both mainstream feminism and anti-racist movements. Although Crenshaw has managed to express a phenomenon that has plagued the lived experiences of Black women for a long time[26] in one all-encompassing word, the characteristics of intersectionality form fundamental parts of Black Feminist theory. In addition, Crenshaw's intersectionality has expanded to include other facets of identity such as class, sexuality etc. alongside the intersections of race and gender (Davis-Yuval, 2015) and power dimensions (Collins and Bilge, 2016: 189).

Yet, as noted by McCall (2005) and Choo and Ferree (2010), despite its usefulness in explaining inequality and the processes that perpetrate it within the social world, intersectionality is not a straightforward framework to use within research

[26] Intersectionality can be found in the works of Truth (1851), Davis, (1983), Lorde (1984), hooks, (1981 1990), the Combahee River Collective (1995), Collins (2000), Gillborn and Mirza (2000), Weber (2001), Brah and Phoenix (2004)

in terms of how to apply it theoretically and methodologically. There are also criticisms levelled against intersectionality which include the primacy of Black women as the epitome of intersectional beings and its empirical validity (Nash, 2008), as well as intersectionality becoming a buzzword with no clear meaning (Davis, 2008). However, May (2014: 94) insists that such criticisms exemplify how "power asymmetries and dominant imaginaries converge in the act of interpretation (or cooptation) of intersectionality…and the impact of dominant expectations or established social imaginaries on meaning-making". Tomlinson (2013) also responds to criticisms of intersectionality by arguing that the ways in which intersectionality are understood and thus critiqued demonstrates racial privilege which stem from particular histories of racial hierarchy and colonization and the creation of intersectionality as a theory by Black women is increasingly becoming an area controlled and colonised in academia by others[27]. I also believe that it is important to reclaim intersectionality's Black women roots and origins despite how it has expanded and how it is now being used and I do so with this study.

Theoretical Frameworks

When it comes to understanding the educational journeys and experiences of Black British women graduates, consideration needs to account for "their cultural, personal and social contexts, which clearly differ significantly from those of men and

[27] Additionally, when I attended the 2018 decolonial Black feminism summer school program in Brazil, Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw discussed her concept of intersectionality and she illustrated that there was an ongoing process of what she called the "gentrification of intersectionality" occurring- particularly within the academy. She asserted how this involved such things as the erasure of the origins from which intersectionality came out of (Critical Race Theory and Black feminism), the dilution of its social justice aims along with the removal of Black women within its creation and meanings. Some of these sentiments are echoed within an interview conducted with Crenshaw (the Columbia Law School, 2017).

women who have not experienced racial and gender oppression," (Howard-Hamilton, 2003: 20). For this reason, two frameworks are crucial to aid in the framing of the research questions and interpretation of data. These are Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Bourdieu's theory of Practice.

Critical Race Theory

CRT originates from Critical Legal Studies which developed in the US from the 1970s. However, it has since expanded both geographically and academically and is currently employed within UK-based research in disciplines such as education, sociology and social policy. Its main focus is on the operation of racism within society and how racial inequalities are perpetrated and maintained. More specifically within educational contexts, CRT as a framework "can be used to deepen understanding of the educational barriers for people of colour, as well as exploring how these barriers are resisted and overcome" (Taylor, 2009:9). CRT has many different dimensions however, Harris (2016: 796) notes that although some core tenets have emerged as its usage has increased within educational research, "CRT scholars do not subscribe to one set of tenets." Being mindful of this, I have chosen to be guided by CRT tenets specifically within educational research and outlined by Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001: 308–42) [emphasis added]:

1. *Centrality of Race and Racism*- All CRT research within education must centralise race and racism, including intersections with other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and citizenship.
2. *Challenging the Dominant Perspective*- CRT research works to challenge the dominant narratives and re-centre marginalized perspectives.
3. *Commitment to Social Justice*- CRT research must always be motivated by a social justice agenda.

4. *Valuing Experiential Knowledge*- CRT builds on the oral traditions of many indigenous Communities of Colour around the world. CRT research centres the narratives of People of Colour when attempting to understand social inequality.
5. *Being Interdisciplinary*- CRT scholars believe that the world is multi-dimensional, and similarly research about the world should reflect multiple perspectives.

CRT enables the educational journeys and experiences of the Black women graduates to be understood and viewed in ways that centre their raced identities and the role of racism within these. It provides an articulation of *how* the centrality of racism in society is upheld as well as the unequal power relations based on perceived racial differences that reproduce unequal lived experiences by privileging whiteness. Often when race or ethnicity are considered in research, the focus tends to be upon those racialised as non-white or 'visible' ethnic minorities in Western societies. As Bhopal (2018:1) contends, this focus can be an attribute of the fact that "individuals from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, by virtue of their racial identity, are positioned as outsiders in a society that values whiteness and 'white privilege'." It is these positionings in society that often have disturbing consequences within every aspect of everyday life in the UK (The Cabinet Office, 2017). CRT actively challenges whiteness as the dominant perspective as well as viewing whiteness as property which creates unequal material and economic resources as well as excluding people of colour from particular spaces (Lipsitz, 2007; Brown et al, 2003; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Bondi, 2012). Moreover, as CRT includes the intersections of other forms of subordination in its analysis, this is especially useful when exploring the roles of class, gender and ethnicity alongside race within the Black women graduates' experiences and journeys.

Additionally, the voices of the Black British women graduates within this study challenge the dominant perspectives, creating profound counter-stories that

emphasise their experiential knowledge as valid regarding their own experiences and journeys. It also highlights the structural inequalities embedded within the education system and how they as a group of individuals are able to navigate. It also facilitates participants to express and share their stories in safe spaces which can be empowering as it validates and affirms their experiences showing that they are visible. The intersectional approach that I employ which includes CRT as one of the frameworks complements the interdisciplinary nature of CRT scholarship.

On the other hand, CRT is not without criticism. Its origins within the US mean that it needs extra care when transferred and used in Britain. Warmington (2014) points this out and details additional concerns such as its development from Critical Legal Studies and the differences in how Black has been defined and used within British educational research. Another point of contention within the UK is that it is argued that CRT gives insufficient attention to class differences which are seen as equally significant when discussing societal and more specifically educational inequality (Cole, 2017). However, there have been numerous Critical Race theorists in the UK that do pay attention to the intersections of class alongside race as its tenet of intersectionality advocates (Gillborn et al, 2012). **T**his thesis also pays attention to these intersections. Litowitz (2009: 307) provides another criticism of CRT by arguing that there is a danger of narcissism as he states that many Critical Race theorists write about themselves and their own personal experiences. He also disapproves of the emotion imbued in storytelling believing that reason is needed within legal fields, and lastly he highlights the irony of the outsider vs. insider structure when he asserts that many Critical Race theorists are “sitting on the faculties at top law schools and publishing in the best law journals,” and therefore Litowitz asks how can they still be viewed as outsiders. However, in this instance CRT is applied to an educational

context and the merits of storytelling are significant within this research as it provides rationale and context, as demonstrated within chapter 1.

The merits of employing a CRT framework are evident to frame and explore Black British women graduates. Their relative invisibility in educational research, as well as their intersectional identities means that CRT is useful for critiquing the unequal power relations premised on race and extending to other identities in the education system. Furthermore, through foregrounding the experiences and voices of Black British women graduates it highlights the lived experiences of surviving in racist institutions upheld by dominant (white) narratives and benefitting those racialised as white (Gillborn, 2013).

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

Bourdieu's theory of Practice, comprising of field, habitus and capital are integral features drawn upon often over the course of this research due to its direct relevance[28]. It provides an undeniably useful way to make sense of the various mechanisms that operate within different fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). His theory of practice concentrates on the dialectical relationship between structure and agency (Mahar et al, 1990:1) and more specifically, I assert that Bourdieu's work enables a commentary about the operation of whiteness through class formations and its exclusionary nature. Moreover, regardless of who my participants are, they all live and move within a white, Western world and its institutions, therefore, as Black women

[28] I have often felt conflicted about using a white, French, middle-class man to articulate and frame the experiences of Black British women which can be viewed as unavoidably problematic because "concepts and theoretical formulations are culture-bound," (Oyewumi, 1997: xv). Yet, according to Go (2013), Bourdieu was well aware and engaged in analyses of colonialism- particularly in Algeria- where he saw it as "a racialized system of domination, backed by force, which restructures social relations," (49); and in fact, Go argues that his theories of "colonial social forms and cultural processes…contained the seeds for some of his later more well-known concepts and ideas like *habitus, field,* and reflexive sociology," [emphasis in original] (51). In this way, it illustrates the multidimensionality of Bourdieu's theories and why, although he is a white, French, middle-class man, I am able to incorporate and use his concepts as tools to articulate the accounts of my sample.

of differing classes, they have to navigate within these to survive. In this light, Bourdieu brings forth the ways that different groups of white people are able to steer their way and thus I am able, alongside CRT, to locate how Black British women fare within this system albeit at the margins. The connection between field, habitus and capital and its relationship to practice is given by way of the formula: **(Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice** [emphasis added] (Bourdieu, 1984: 101). It is important to unpack this formula within studies that it is applied to and I proceed to do this in the following parts of this section. However, it must be acknowledged that Bourdieu's concepts also contribute to understandings of the education system in Western societies and in particular, the inequalities which are inherent characteristics within it- more generally class reproduction (Stephens and Gillies, 2012). Bourdieu (1974: 39) shows how the structure of the education system privileges particular groups because:

> "the culture of the elite is so near that of the school that children from the lower middle class (and the *fortiori* from the agricultural and industrial working class) can only acquire with great effort something which is *given* to children of the cultivated classes."

To elaborate more, he presents the notion that some individuals and groups, namely the upper- and middle-classes within the previous extract, have unfair advantages because the education system is a reflection of themselves. Therefore, they are more likely to be valued and do well within it as they are able to successfully navigate within it. The advantages that they share in originate in the form of habitus along with the type and volume of the various capitals that they possess. The following

is a brief description of field, habitus, capital and strategy in order to summarise Bourdieu's theory of Practice and how it will relate to this study.

Field

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 97) the term 'field' refers to:

> "a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents and institutions, by their present and potential situation *(situs)* in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.)."

In other words, the world as a social space is divided into his metaphor of field and his work shows how groups and individuals engage in games in these fields where, they are *agents* actively competing within predetermined structures such as the education system. Fields are underpinned by doxa in which arbitrariness[29] become a natural part within it, maintaining and reproducing the power relations which include beliefs and values prevalent within each field (Bourdieu, 1977). It allows the dominant groups to classify and name, as well as to conceal the unequal power relations that keep them at an advantage (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2004). As individuals and groups compete in the field, they utilise *trump cards* in the form of habitus (discussed

[29] Crossley (2001) describes arbitrariness as what becomes internalised by individuals in society as unspoken but commonly understood. It can manifest in the discourses within the field which are not fixed but reproduced via the discourse.

below), and power which he denotes as the volume of capital (also discussed below) that they possess. In this way, he puts forward that, although different fields[30] which he describes as "relatively autonomous social microcosms," (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97), have differing rules; it is habitus and capital that determine *how* individuals and groups play the game, as well as whether they are successful in maintaining and advancing their positions and then passing these *trump cards* to their offspring, particularly in the field of education in which this research is concerned with (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

Habitus

The term habitus is generally understood to mean "a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices," (Bourdieu, 1974: vii). In more detail, the habitus is intangible and attributed to the way in which individuals and groups behave, speak as well as their style, knowledge and understandings of the world. In essence, it can also equate to the durable ways of "feeling and thinking," (Bourdieu, 1990a: 70). In this way, habitus is closely connected to the field because it influences how individuals operate within it as the habitus is "a structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that word- a field- and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world," (Bourdieu, 1998: 81).

Due to the structure of the education system then, it is the habitus of particular groups that are valued and seen as legitimate within the field of education and thus

[30] Different fields include political, religious, artistic, economic, education etc.

gives students who possess it an advantage. This is maintained by Reay (2004a: 433) when she writes that “the operation of the habitus regularly excludes certain practices, those that are unfamiliar to the cultural groupings to which the individual belongs,” or which are in opposition to what is valued within the education system. One type of habitus is generated from the family by way of how they socialise their offspring regarding such things as behaviour, knowledge and speech as well as both the volume of capital they possess and how they deploy it within the field (Rollock et al, 2015, Brooker, 2002). It is important to note however that the habitus is “a mediating construct, not a determining one,” which changes depending on the field (Mahar et al, 1990: 12).

Bourdieu has also written on the gendered dimensions of habitus more specifically and this resonates to Butler’s work on gender performativity as mentioned earlier. In fact, within his 1990b essay *La Domination Masculine* which translates to *Masculine Domination,* he acknowledges how gender constructs act as a way that “differentiates according to both antagonistic and complementary principles, and operates as a highly complex, differentiated and vital symbolic order,” (Krais, 2006: 120) in which the basis of this is attributed to the different roles played by men and women within sexual intercourse and reproduction. Most importantly, Krais (2006: 124) further explains that “through the habitus, the gender classification is integrated into individual action, forms of social practice, and worldviews. But it is also above all through the habitus that the gender classification is, kept alive[31].” This is still in evidence in patriarchal societies which stem from notions that men are superior to women in terms of biological difference and capability, thus dividing them along such lines with expectations to perform different roles. These roles stipulate that men are

[31] I acknowledge that these observations are heteronormative and do not resonate well with my use of intersectionality

supposed to be out in the workplace and women are required to remain in the household (Fulcher and Scott, 2011: 163). Though these lines have largely been eroded as more women enter the workplace and pursue further education in increasing numbers. However, inequality based upon gender is still a contentious issue that has yet to be fully eradicated.

Capitals

In terms of capitals, for Bourdieu these can be seen as power or *trump cards* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) where doxa, which underpins the field (as mentioned previously) controls capital in terms of what forms are valued and by whom (Anderson, 2016: 694). Bourdieu's capitals are different to economic capital; an intangible, additional resource employed within different fields by individuals and groups. It is closely associated with habitus which can determine both the volume of capitals and how they are deployed. For Bourdieu, capitals come in the form of cultural (forms of knowledge, communication and values), social (connections and resources which are accrued from membership into certain social networks) and symbolic (power and status) (Bourdieu, 1986). These capitals are interrelated, can be converted into each other as well as be accessed through and with economic capital. They are significant because capitals give meaning to the field and for instance, depending on the field, they are utilised in many ways as tools to advance successfully.

Moreover, capital and habitus work together and can also be used to provide insights about the role of gender within educational fields. According to Dumais (2002: 47) in her article about cultural capital, gender and school success, "one's habitus, [is] determined by the available opportunity structure or field, shapes the type of class-

based capital that men and women have, resulting in gendered forms of cultural capital." Within this study, some of the Black women graduates discuss the ways they feel they have better experiences than their Black male peers which can be due to the way in which they are able to deploy their gendered habitus and cultural capital which they imply helps them to navigate with greater ease. However, such gender-based analysis has limits if other factors such as race and social class are not included making it "risky because doing so obscures the ways in which social class and race elaborate the gender-achievement relationship," (Mickelson, 2003: 373).

Having discussed how fields, habitus and capitals work together within Bourdieu's theory of practice, it is evident why it is applied to understand the mechanisms at play within the education system as well as the inequalities. The final part of this section addresses a final significant contribution that Bourdieu makes, which is particularly useful to outline due to its relevance here in this study.

Strategy

Bourdieu (1977) shares his notion of strategy to explain "the differences he identified between what people did and what the rules suggested they would do," (Anderson, 2016: 695). This ultimately illustrates how Bourdieu's theory of practice is stimulated. For Mahar et al (1990: 19), they claim that:

> "strategy and struggle work within the logic of practice for the purposes of recognition, legitimation, capital and access to capital within the symbolic and material world. All these forms of practice are seen to be created and bounded by habitus, by the objective structures which define the social field, and by a whole host of other strategies to hide the fact of struggle for capital."

When exploring the educational journeys and experiences of Black British women graduates, the notion of strategy is important when trying to interpret what influences Black British women graduates over the course of their educational trajectories. In particular, capitals are significant to explore here as within the field of education, they can be utilised "as a weapon and as a stake of struggle, that which allows its possessors to wield a power, an influence, and thus *exist*, in the field under consideration, instead of being considered a negligible quantity," (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 98). Moreover, it is also important to note that ultimately, "without resources, there can be no strategies," (Morgan, 1989: 24). This is an additional reason why Black British women graduates' educational journeys and experiences may be useful to uncover in order to see the kinds of resources (capitals) they generate and utilise, the roles it has played and the strategies they employ along the way. Moreover, as every individual has a distinct habitus, it will be insightful to see how the ones possessed by Black British women graduates' enable them to operate within the educational field. This will also build on other literature which has explored the innovative processes where Black students have used and created their own forms of capital within the educational field previously (Franklin, 2002; Carter, 2003; Rollock et al 2015; Wallace 2017a; 2018).

Overall, Bourdieu's theory of practice is a useful framework to interpret what is happening within society and more specifically, in different fields, such as the education system. It is important to note that, in a similar way to CRT which originated from US contexts, many of Bourdieu's concepts were translated from French and were based on French society. Therefore, how it has been interpreted warrants scrutiny both language wise and when employed to understand British society and its institutions (The Friday Morning Group, 1990: 195). In addition, another point of

contention about Bourdieu's theories are highlighted by Ball (2003: 12) who often uses Bourdieu's work to investigate educational contexts. He acknowledges that "a colleague once described my work as unfair to the middle classes". Although, it can be said that by employing Bourdieu's theories, it will inevitably highlight the inequality and advantageous positions that are true of many of the middle-classes within the education system. This also provides an alternative focus to the lamenting and blaming culture frequently reserved for working-class students and their families (Evans, 2006; Ingram, 2008). Lastly, although he refers to individuals and groups as agents who are actively involved in struggle and strategy, he can be viewed as deterministic in that regardless of *how* the game is played, there will always be certain groups at the top who are winning. On the other hand, his theories can be seen to have transformative qualities which not only diagnose the issues but can stimulate positive solutions to correct them (Mills 2008; DiGiorgio, 2009; Barrett and Martina, 2012).

Critical Race Theory & Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

The employment of both Critical Race Theory and Bourdieu's theory of Practice alongside research grounded in Black feminist epistemology (discussed in chapter 4) in some ways contrast. This is because, where the role of race and racism is central within Critical Race Theory; class-based inequalities and how these are reproduced in different areas of society and its institutions are central for Bourdieu. However, each of these concerns are useful when exploring the experiences of Black British women graduates as both racial and class identities are central in the questions I pose, which can be articulated with CRT and Bourdieu's theory of Practice lens. While Bourdieu's

theory of practice shows how habitus and capitals interact with and shape what happens in the field (the education system). CRT foregrounds the ways in which racism and race are integral features in Western societies and institutions and how these have significant implications for groups like Black British women, impacting upon their habitus, capitals and how these operate within the education system. By using both of these frameworks within this research, it is hoped that both Bourdieu's theory of Practice and CRT will compliment and expand each other. For instance, CRT will add the dimension of race to Bourdieu's theory of Practice in terms of how habitus and capitals may be deployed and operate in different ways for Black British women due to the imbedded racial as well as class and gendered inequalities in the education system. This research builds on the existing body of work that has employed both CRT and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice **(**Allen and Boyce, 2013; Rampersad, 2014; Rollock et al, 2015).

The intersectional approach and theoretical frameworks appropriately explore the intersectional gendered, raced and classed identities of the Black British women graduates in this research. By employing the lens of CRT and Bourdieu's theory of Practice, it will articulate the nuances that these identities bring to their educational experiences and journeys, as well as how they are influenced by the structural factors of the education system. In this study, both CRT and BTP are placed and employed within the context of Black feminist epistemology[32], to provide theoretical support, as illustrated in the diagram[33].

[32] To be discussed later in chapter 4

[33] See appendix 8 (page 352) for a diagram and explanation about the operations of the ontology, epistemology and theoretical frameworks

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to outline and examine the thesis' conceptual underpinnings through identity categories of the sample and to illustrate how they merge with the theoretical frameworks to appropriately articulate the educational journeys and experiences of the Black British women graduates in this study. The first section discussed gender in relation to how Black women are depicted in mainstream UK discourse. It then explored how the term 'Black' has been understood, leading to the formation of syncretic, hybrid cultures which the 'Black British' identities of the sample emerge from. This was followed by a brief consideration of 'graduate' in this thesis where notions of educational 'success' in relation to Black women will be explored further. The first section concluded with the illustration of the significant role of class in relation to race to show particular considerations when focusing on Black British communities as a whole.

The previous discussions about identities foregrounded the second section in terms of why an intersectional approach is employed throughout the study, comprising of the theoretical frameworks of CRT and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice to illustrate the intersecting nature of power dynamics shrouded in sexism, racism and classism within the education system. Having discussed how I view the sample's identities and therefore the lens in which I plan to interpret their educational journeys and experiences, the next chapter will review the literature in order to locate where this research fits and how it builds upon it.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter examines the existing literature to locate the educational journeys and experiences of Black British girls and young women within the education system. It begins by considering the role of race, gender and class in education to position Black girls. This is done in relation to Black students as a whole, Black boys, South Asian and white girls. These considerations illustrate the importance of intersectionality especially as it becomes evident that race, gender and class operate differently for diverse groups in educational contexts. Next, it examines literature on the whiteness of educational institutions- upheld by policy and the curriculum, as well as the impact it has on students. Then an exploration about understandings of educational 'success' will illustrate its narrow meritocratic and neoliberal underpinnings that fail to include alternative ways that it should be viewed. It concludes by presenting the key themes explored as part of the current study and how this research builds upon previous studies to contribute significantly to the field.

Race, gender and class in education

The focus on race, gender and class identities is an established consideration in research that attempts to include many groups in educational debates in order to address educational inequalities (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Mirza, 1992, 1997; Gaine and George, 1999; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Hughes et al, 2009; Youdell, 2010; Strand

2010; Strand, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, Shaw et al, 2016). Such research asserts the importance for understanding students as whole beings who possess multiple identities but also the need to examine the relationships between these intersecting identities (Youdell, 2010: 27). This provides nuance and better contexts to illustrate how different groups of students are positioned and experience the education system (Connolly, 1998; Demack et al, 2000). Race, gender and class impact upon all stages of education like the types of educational institutions that one has access to and attends (Ball et al, 2002; Connor et al, 2004; Coldron et al, 2010; McCowan, 2015; Mitchell, 2017); subject choice (Reay et al, 2001; Henderson et al, 2017; Moulton et al, 2018); exclusion and drop-out rates (Social Market Foundation, 2017; Department for education, 2018c) and attainment and outcomes (Richardson, 2013; Jones et al, 2017; Advance HE, 2018; Parsons, 2018). Along these lines, this section examines literature regarding Black students as a whole and then considers differences in the experiences of Black boys and girls, as well as in relation to South Asian girls and the dominant white group.

Black Students

In the introduction to Mac an Ghaill's (1988:1) book, he shares a question one of his Black Caribbean student respondents asked: "Why do teachers hate black kids?" During the book, readers see how racism is ingrained into the English education system; how it influences the predominantly white teachers' interactions and positionings of different groups of working-class Black and Asian students; and how these students react and respond to the discrimination. Mac an Ghaill's study can be

seen as an alternative of government commissioned reports that investigated lower attainment of Black and minority ethnic children within the education system (the Rampton Committee, 1981; the Swann Committee, 1985; Mortimore et al, 1988). Yet, Mac an Ghaill (1988: 155) provides novel insights, through the centring of Black and Asian student voices "that results in [highlighting] their experience of a 'different reality' from the white population both in school and in wider society…involving creative strategies of survival". Additionally, while Mac an Ghaill (1988: 43-44) includes both Black and Asian students in his study, the distinctiveness of Black Caribbean student experiences are exemplified when he shares how for instance, they were more likely than Asian students to be viewed as "truculent" and placed in lower streams in spite of having "'higher ability' than their Asian and white peers". More recently, Tomlin et al (2014: 50) theorises how the distinct experiences and underachievement of Black British Caribbean students in the education system is part of a wider, capitalist and structural process: one where, the status quo, through media and other tools, encourages sport, entertainment and Black underclass ways of being "as the basis for social integration in their society and world," leading to Black students no longer seeing the benefits of engaging in academic routes. In this way, the educational experiences of Black students specifically, warrants more attention especially if, as Gilroy (1981: 208) wrote "different racisms are found in different social formations and historical circumstances." Thus, I assert that Black students are distinct to other ethnic minority groups within the English education system as they are subject to a particular form of racism- antiblackness. For Dumas (2016), antiblackness is connected with the historical legacies of slavery, as outlined within the field of afro-pessimism, where Black people have never been seen as human. By this, Dumas (2016: 13-14) argues that:

> "antiblackness does not signify a mere racial conflict that might be resolved through organized political struggle and appeals to the state and to the citizenry for redress. Instead, antiblackness marks an irreconcilability between the Black and any sense of social or cultural regard…antiblackness is not to offer solutions to racial inequality, but to come to a deeper understanding of the Black condition within a context of utter contempt for, and acceptance of violence against the Black [group]".

Moreover, he explains further that antiblackness continues precisely because:

> "There is no clear historical moment in which there was a break between slavery and acknowledgement of Black citizenship and Human-ness; nor is there any indication of a clear disruption of the technologies of violence—that is, the institutional structures and social processes—that maintain Black subjugation".

While he is writing based on US contexts, antiblackness exists within wider British contexts due to its participation in slavery and colonialism (Madriaga, 2018). Moreover, in agreement with Dumas, Givens (2016) argues that the education system is a tool to maintain white supremacy, keeping Black people in the diaspora within dehumanising and marginalised positions in society. Within this context, when Gillborn (1997) stated that young Black students were being failed by the education system, or when Crozier (2005) declared that 'there's a war against our children' while studying the educational experiences of Black African-Caribbean children, they were referencing the historical and continuing educational injustices faced disproportionately by this group. Educational injustices include the exclusion from mainstream schooling because Black children were labelled as educationally 'subnormal' (Coard, 1971; Tominson, 1981; Ford et al, 1982; Artiles and Trent, 1994;

Copper et al, 1991). This is because, as Blair (1994: 283) wrote, “the two images of African-Caribbean students which continue to be reproduced in schools are those of the ‘underachiever’ and the ‘behaviour problem”. Youdell (2003) and Rollock (2007a) have comparable findings where Black students were characterised by teachers as undesirable learners and in opposition to the white educational space. Recently, Hamilton (2018: 580) conveys similar sentiments to Gillborn and Crozier, articulating how new policies and changes in the education market excessively discriminate against Black Caribbean students, at every stage, because they are seen as ‘toxic consumers’ and risky for educational institutions who are increasingly required to meet targets. This will be discussed further in the next section about educational institutions.

While I discussed the experiences of Black students as a whole, before distinguishing between Black boys and girls, I bring attention to the lack of diversity within the previous literature in the consideration of ethnicity and cultural background. As evidenced within the previous chapter, encompassed within ‘Black British’ identities are a myriad of African as well as Caribbean heritages. In this way, much of the existing literature either does not differentiate between British Caribbean or African students consistently or conflates them under the label ‘African-Caribbean’. Moreover, educational studies about Black students has tended to privilege Black Caribbean educational experiences to speak for all Black students. In a similar way Valdez and Golash-Boza (2017: 2257) convey the significance of expanding intersectionality to include race and ethnicity separately as they “influence and reflect fundamentally different inter-/intra- group relationships and dynamics that contribute to the life chances of group members”. The scholarship of Ogbu (1993), Murray-Johnson (2013) and Berry and Candis (2013) support Valdez and Golash-Boza by advocating similar considerations in research about race. Additionally, as stated by Robinson-Wood

(2009:78) she echoes my observations when she raises concerns that within educational contexts:

> "research tends to group Black people homogeneously and treat them as a monolith…academic, social and linguistic realities connected to ethnicity need exploration so as not to overemphasise the visibility of race and minimise invisible identities such as ethnicity."

This is especially pertinent when statistics like exclusion rates indicate that Black Caribbean students have higher rates of being excluded from school than Black African students at 10% compared to 4% respectively (Gov.uk, 2018b)[34]. Additionally, there are slight variations in terms of attainment at GCSE level where Black African students outperform Black Caribbean students by 12% (Gov.uk, 2017) and Black Caribbean students are the least likely to attend high tariff universities (Office for Students, 2018). While there is a dearth of literature surrounding the educational experiences of British African heritage students, Demie (2006) and Demie and McLean (2007) offer some insights to the better achievement compared to Caribbean students which include high educational aspirations instilled by parents and alignment with the rules and regulations within schools. These findings are in opposition to the existing literature that largely positioned Black Caribbean students as in conflict with the education system due to unacknowledged racial bias. Moreover, the privileging of Caribbean Blackness can be seen to occur as Youdell (2003: 16) identifies that Black students "who do not fit enduring constitutions of Blackness are frequently overlooked or constituted as exceptional (for instance, especially talented; middle-class, not-working class; African not Caribbean)." As British African groups are more recent migrants compared to British Caribbean groups, overall they are entering into the

[34] Based on temporary exclusions in 2016/2017

education system much later and therefore may experience it in different ways. In a widely contested paper by Ogbu (1993), he explains how minority group statuses are connected to different cultural references that leads to different experiences and outcomes for minority groups which are evidenced through academic performance and achievement. Although Ogbu's theory can be viewed as a deficit, deterministic and essentialist model (Hamann, 2004); I propose that Ogbu supplies a comprehensive and useful framework that expresses distinctions between minority groups and how their engagement within particular societies is shaped by wider contexts and historical legacies.

Additionally, much of the existing literature that I have cited does not differentiate between class backgrounds among Black students or, as is the case for Mac an Ghaill (1988), focuses on Black working-class experiences. Yet, there is emerging scholarship (Ball et al, 2011; Maylor and Williams, 2011; Vincent et al, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Gillborn et al, 2012; Rollock, 2014; Rollock et al, 2015) that acknowledges and considers the growing Black middle-classes (albeit predominantly Caribbean) and thus provides alternative and further educational experiences to the largely Black working-class ones. Ethnicity and cultural background, alongside class, discussed later, are key themes within this study.

Black boys and girls

Gilroy (1993: 85) stated that "gender is the modality in which race is lived" which may be an indication for the differences in the educational experiences of Black British boys and girls. In much of the existing literature, the intersections of race and gender are the prominent lens that their experiences are viewed from. Yet where racism may

impact Black boys, racism *and* sexism impact Black girls (Gerwitz, 1991; Wright et al, 1999). In particular, educational studies in the UK have paid attention to the interplay of Black boys' racialised masculinities within their educations where they are viewed and positioned as deviant (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Gillborn, 1990; Conolly, 1995; Sewell, 1997; Mirza, 1999; Wright et al,1998; Alexander, 1996; Majors et al, 2001, Odih, 2002; Lindsay and Muljs, 2007; Byfield, 2008). Within a dedicated chapter about Black Caribbean boys, Mac an Ghaill (1988) focuses on the 'Rasta heads' sub-culture where they openly resisted the schooling process and the authority of the white teachers who they saw as representing white society. They also had an awareness of the operations of racism which led them to "questioning the validity of academic success and qualifications" (ibid: 90). Therefore, these Black boys often faced harsh discipline from teachers. In Sewell's (1997) study, he centered the educational experiences of Black Caribbean boys illustrating how they both aspired and were encouraged in the direction of sports and entertainment due to the higher status careers that these sectors would provide. In this way, they were viewed as physical rather than academic beings. As mentioned previously, Tomlin et al (2014) discuss aspirations to these careers as part of a global phenomenon. Moreover, Wright et al (2000: 74) additionally note the ways that Black boys' masculinity is viewed, functioning and seen within the school as a threat, leading to them being more likely to receive harsher treatment such as exclusion.

Wright (2013: 90) states that "it is important to note the intersecting dimensions of race, class and gender can result in privileges or penalties depending on their positioning". This was evident in Rollock's (2007b: 201) study that found that Black girls had slight advantages in how they were viewed based on their genders, but that their raced identities simultaneously disadvantaged them as they "become viewed in

direct relation to the sets of ongoing bothered beliefs and contentious concerns that exist for black boys". Black girls and young women within the UK are characterized as being 'anti-school but pro-education' (Fuller, 1980; Anyon, 1983; Chigwada, 1987); exhibiting high levels of self-esteem (Coultas, 1989); devising ingenious strategies to overcome inequalities (Bryan et al, 1985; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Kelly, 2018) and being determined to succeed and progress along their educational journeys in whichever ways were open to them (Mirza, 1992; Gordon, 2007). The studies suggest that Black British girls and women have contradictory relationships with educational institutions, along with distinct attitudes and strategies to navigate within them. This contradictory relationship stems from a perceived lack of fit between institutions that are situated in white, middle-class, masculine spaces and Black women whom have 'triple subordination'[35] (Morokvasic, 1983; Mac an Ghaill, 1988) based upon their conflicting identities within such spaces (Coultas, 1989). However, unlike Black boys, it seems that Black girls are able to navigate with slightly more success which is attributed to their distinct 'anti-school but pro-education' attitudes and commitment to education. As such, it indicates the collective acceptance of the benefits of education and the desire to gain qualifications, but also discontent with the institutional processes. From this context, strategies like "resistance within accommodation" (Mac an Ghaill, 1988: 26) develop among young Black women where in succeeding work (Mac an Ghaill, 1989: 282) explains:

> "Like pro-school students they conformed to technical demands made upon them, such as working in class, completing projects, doing homework and preparing for examinations. But like anti-school students they did not automatically conform to their schools' social demands, in terms of appropriate

[35] I am aware that 'triple subordination' belongs to the 'addictive' approach that intersectionalty has tried to respond and improve on but I include it here to show its usage in academic literature about Black girls

dress and hair-style, keeping silent in class, being on time for lessons, showing teachers respect and appearing studious in lessons".

This shows that they co-operate to a certain point but doing so on their own terms. Moreover, many Black girls are second, third and even fourth generation British, which creates further differences between how they navigate and engage with the English education system compared to how their parents and grandparents did (Mirza, 2008; Franklin-Brown, 2013; Rollock et al, 2015; Sangster, 2018) Further research can reveal whether this generation of Black girls and women have similar experiences and responses.

Furthermore, Mirza (1992; 1997; and Reay, 2000; 2006a, 2006b, 2008) has consistently asserted that young Black women place high value on education as it provides a useful tool to subvert inequalities they face and assists in securing better life chances for themselves and their children. In her study *Young, Female and Black,* Mirza (1992) illustrates that the young Black women attending two inner-city secondary schools believe in the meritocratic underpinnings of the education system. Therefore, they work hard, but also decide strategically on accessible careers, while finding ways around low teacher expectations, under-resourced schools and having to stay longer in education in order to gain 'backdoor entry' into further education. In addition to this, the strong emphasis and value placed on education is connected with achieving independence which is also very important for Black girls (Riley, 1985; Tomlinson, 1983). These differences in the positioning of Black boys and girls and their feelings towards education is reflected in statistics that show, for example, at the end of schooling, Black girls (48%) slightly outperform Black boys (41%), (Gov.uk, 2018a)[36]. Also, Black girls and young women are more likely to continue onto

[36] Though the merits of this are questionable considering that both results are below the national average

university and, Black students had the highest proportion of women participating at undergraduate level compared to all other ethnic groups (Advance HE, 2018:186-87). On the other hand, Black women in particular, are least likely to attain First class degrees and are the second most unlikely to achieve upper second class (2:1) at the end of their time at university (Shilliam, 2015: 33; Advance HE, 2018: 198). This will be discussed further in the 'educational 'success'' section of this chapter.

South Asian girls

As noted by Gillborn and Mirza (2000: 26), race, gender and class within education and the way these identities interact with each other greatly influences educational attainment. For instance, within their report, they highlight that statistics show that all girls[37] from non-manual backgrounds[38] outperformed other girls from the same racial group who came from manual backgrounds. However, there were stark differences between girls from non-manual backgrounds according to race. Further scholars like Rothon (2007) and Strand (2010, 2014a, 2014b, 2015) reinforce Gillborn and Mirza's findings. In terms of experiences and positionings within the education system, the existing literature about South Asian girls and women suggests that they develop 'flexible' identities which encompass their races, ethnicity and cultures, as well as their Britishness in similar ways that Black student groups do (Rasool, 1999). This is because, Rasool notes that both of these groups have similar experiences of being first- and second-generation migrants which has been echoed by Dwyer (2000).

[37] Grouped as: Indian, White, Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Black in table

[38] which I translate to convey higher class backgrounds for the purposes of this section

Moreover, Mirza (2008; 2009; 2018), who employs Black and postcolonial feminist frameworks asserts that both Black and Asian women juggle and have to navigate and "excavate the silences and pathological appearances of a collectivity of women assigned as the 'other' as she is produced in a gendered, sexualized, and wholly racialized global discourse," (Mirza: 2009: 4). In this way, through her inclusion of Black and Asian women within a shared category, she exercises 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1988; Brah, 2000). In addition, like Black girls, South Asian girls are also deeply invested in education and aspire and participate in higher education at similar 'costs', based on their race, gender and class identities (Mirza, 2006a, 2006b; Bagguley and Hussain, 2016) but also religion (Bhopal, 2010, 2016a; Ludhra, 2015).

Unlike Black girls, the positioning of South Asian girls, and particularly Muslim South Asian girls in research focuses on their strict parents who do not give them much freedom and wish for their daughters to study at local universities (Ijaz and Abbas, 2010). Such findings of strict cultural, religious and gendered boundaries have historically characterised South Asian girls as a group within the education system (Sharpe, 1976; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Gaine and George, 1999: 25-26; Ghuman, 1994, 2001; 2002). Yet, this has changed dramatically as South Asian girls are increasingly displaying independent and assertive attributes within their educations (Shain, 1996; Ahmad, 2006; Ludhra, 2015). Interestingly, much of the existing literature about South Asian girls considers additional intersections of identity like religion, ethnicity and cultural background (Shain, 1996; Bhopal, 2010, Ludra, 2015). This is significant to note as it calls attention to the broadness of the 'South Asian' category and how these additional identities create nuances within the educational experiences of girls and women within the same racialised group. These considerations are also applicable

and necessary to interrogate within the educational experiences and journeys of Black girls and women who are delineated within the equally broad category of 'Black'.

White girls

Black girls have gender in common with white girls and in some cases, social class also. However, when considering this group, like Black and Asian girls, the category of 'white' is very diverse and encompasses British, but also Polish, Turkish, Portuguese, Albanian and Lithuanian groups along with Irish and Gypsy/Traveller groups (Strand, 2015: 15)[39]. Due to this diversity, white British and white Other groups cannot be viewed as homogenous and will inevitably have differing experiences and attainment within education (Demie and Lewis, 2010; Bhopal, 2011a, 2011c; Flynn, 2013). Mirza (1992) illustrated the ways that the Black Caribbean women students in her study defined their womanhood and compared this to how white Irish women students did. Both groups of young women shared working-class backgrounds, were second generation British and had a shared history of experiencing discrimination on arrival in England[40]. Through understanding their attitudes of womanhood, Mirza hoped to be able to identify their views on education and therefore the choices the young women made. Mirza (1992: 150) found that the Irish young women displayed pride in their Irish identities and conformed to traditional gender roles where they "frequently chose 'female-type' work such as that of nursery nurses, shop assistants, beauticians, secretaries and so on,", but hoped to only do this until they were married.

[39] Though there is literature on how these groups 'fail' to meet the criterion of 'whiteness' (Bhopal, 2011c; Leonardo, 2016)

[40] 'No Irish! No Blacks! No dogs!' were common signs that greeted Irish and Black Caribbean people in 1950s England (The Guardian, 2015)

On the other hand, Mirza (1992: 154) revealed that for Black Caribbean young women, they did not conform as much to traditional gender roles like their Irish peers and aspired for careers that would grant them financial independence. Such differences and particularly the Black Caribbean women's desire for independence can be due to an awareness of sexism and racism and viewing educational qualifications as a way to ease these (Fuller, 1980; Tomlinson, 1981), as well as understanding the discrimination faced by Black men. More recently, there has been a body of scholarship that highlights how white working-class girls are positioned in similarly negative ways within school contexts to Black girls (Reay, 1997,1998; Archer et al, 2007a, 2007b; Hollingworth and Williams, 2009; Ringrose and Renold, 2010; Allan and Charles, 2013). In fact, Archer et al's (2007a: 565) paper draws upon how working-class and gender identities are positioned within an inner-city school. They express in their article how working-class girls were often depicted as being problems and failures; were more likely to be assertive and speak their minds and often became disengaged with school because there was a "dissonance [that] emerged as the girls' performances and embodied identities classed against a dominant discourse of the idealised middle class female pupil". In this way, Archer et al are signaling similarities according to the class of girls across races and ethnicities in a similar way that Mirza did in her 1992 study. Though, for white girls, class tends to be the main point of difference which impacts how education is experienced and their outcomes. This social class differentiation among Black girls is not as developed in the same way and further research can provide insights into how this influences their education.

Educational institutions as hostile spaces of whiteness

Whiteness

The overwhelming whiteness of the education system is a feature that cannot be ignored within the educational journeys and experiences of the Black British women graduates in this study. This is articulated within Bourdieu's (1977; and Wacquant, 1992; 2004) work about the 'field' which asserts the way that whiteness defines and works through the educational field. This is regardless of the type of educational institution that they attend where whiteness "resides in social structures that systematically disadvantage certain groups of people on the basis of their 'race'," (Bryan, 2012: 608). In this way, the consideration of whiteness here lends itself to the growing body of work along with dedicated journals like *Whiteness and Education* and *Race Traitor*, that underpin Critical Whiteness studies (Allen, 1992; Frankenberg, 1997; Hill, 1997; Leonardo, 2002; 2016; Leonardo and Manning, 2015; Ware and Back, 2002; Byrne, 2006; Wray, 2006; Twine and Gallagher, 2008; Hughey, 2015; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Marx, 2004; Bhopal, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018). This field of study has shifted the gaze, making whiteness as a category and a resource more visible. In this way, as Chen (2017: 17) notes, this distinct body of work "aims to acknowledge and expose whiteness in hopes of correcting a racialised world." Following on from this, Nayak (2007: 738) defines the foundations of Critical Whiteness studies where:

1. Whiteness is a modern invention; it has changed over time and place.
2. Whiteness is a social norm and has become chained to an index of unspoken privileges.
3. The bonds of whiteness can yet be broken/deconstructed for the betterment of humanity.

Yet, it must also be noted that, “while whiteness generally carries privilege in European-American contexts, the extent of such privilege depends greatly on the principles of intersectionality or mattering. That is, white women and men of different classes, disabilities and sexual orientations are not equally privileged in equivalent circumstances,” (Dottolo and Kaschack, 2015: 179). On the other hand, as noted by Guinier (2004: 114), while whiteness benefits the status quo primarily, race is used “as a decoy offer[ing] short-term psychological advantages to poor and working-class whites, but it also masks how much poor whites have in common with poor black and other people of color.” The power of whiteness extends to influencing the ways that different places and spaces are racialised as well as who is seen to naturally belong there (Delaney, 1998; 2002; Robinson, 2002; Hoelscher, 2003; Hytten and Warren, 2003; McKittrick and Woods, 2007; Inwood and Martin, 2008; Yull, 2014; Anderson 2015). By way of reinforcement that not all white students are in advantaged positions, a finding within a report by Ajegbo et al (2007:31) suggests that in educational contexts, at times, in schools where the majority of students are from ethnic minority backgrounds, some white pupils “feel beleaguered and marginalised, finding their own identities under threat as much as minority ethnic children might not have theirs recognised.” However, the merits of Ajegbo et al’s (2007) observations at a multicultural school are questionable considering the overwhelming whiteness of the education system. Within CRT the central analysis of race and racism evidences how it is ingrained and thus impacts upon the structures and workings of society where the operation of whiteness, through the global system of white supremacy, reproduces and maintains it. This maintenance and reproduction are facilitated due to the extensive nature of white supremacy which is:

> "a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings," (Ansley, 1997: 592).

Furthermore, other theorists have also contributed ideas regarding whiteness more generally such as Mills (1997:1) who highlights white supremacy as "the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today." For Mills (1997: 3), he puts forward how all humans are engaged within what he defines as a *'*racial contract' but, what is unique about this contract is that it "is not a contract between everybody ("we the people"), but between just the people who count, the people who really are people ("we the white people")". In this sense, it shows that although Black and ethnic minority people are complicit within the workings of whiteness, its insidious nature makes it difficult to penetrate- especially as it is often masked as invisible (Dei et al, 2004). Leonardo (2013) extends Mills' idea of the racial contract, along with CRT within the education system to highlight the different student experiences based on their race and as an example to show how racism is an ingrained feature within the system and therefore can never be a neutral place. Other CRT scholars agree with Leonardo's findings about educational institutions (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Dixson and Rosseau, 2005; Taylor et al, 2009; Chadderton, 2013).

Institutionalised whiteness

The whiteness of society and its institutions has been characterised as *institutionalised whiteness* (Frankenburg ,1993; Kivel, 1996; Purwar, 2004; Shilliam, 2015). Joseph-Salisbury (2019: 12), argues that, through the positioning of Black bodies as outsiders within particular educational spaces, facilitated by microaggressions (Sue et al 2010; Rollock, 2012), it serves the purpose of "every day, interpersonal manifestation of institutional whiteness and structural white supremacy…creating and maintaining white space". Similar findings about microaggressions and being positioned as outsiders were previously reported by (Sian, 2017) regarding Black and ethnic minority academics in British universities, and specifically for women of colour academics in British academia (Gabriel and Tate, 2017). More recently, Bhopal and Chapman (2019: 102) explored the experiences of international ethnic minority academics at predominantly white institutions and they write how the operation of institutionalised whiteness is experienced through the privileging of whiteness "through the maintenance of power, resources, accolades, and systems of support through formal institutional structures and procedures". There has been a handful of articles which express the unique experiences of Black women academics in Britain. Jones (2006) critiques the limits of social justice and diversity within the higher education sector. She also argues that despite the implementation of equality legislation to tackle racial and gendered discrimination in the academy, little has improved for Black British women academics as they 'fall between the cracks' as both their gendered and raced identities are not adequately addressed in such legislation. This has been highlighted by Bhopal and Henderson (2019) in their report that explores leading gender and racial equality higher education charters- Athena

Swan (ASC) and the Race Equality Charter (REC). One significant difference they found is that “the REC has not been linked to research award funding, and therefore does not occupy the same imperative position as the ASC,” (Bhopal and Henderson, 2019: 9). In some ways this indicates the level of support given to gender compared to racial equality and how it does not address staff and students who are both women and from BAME backgrounds. Likewise, Wright et al (2007: 152) showed that even though the Black women academics within her study had the necessary skills and qualifications, they often felt out of place in the overwhelming whiteness and were only accommodated in “the spaces being marked for Black women academics…not based on merit, but instead…created and assigned on the grounds of race. The institution has also accordingly ascribed a lower status to this area of work”. This led to the Black women academics feeling devalued and restricted. Rollock (2016) shares a fictional account based on composite experiences of Black women employees within higher education. Within it, the Black woman academic aims to enter the academy to help make society better through her contributions both in the academy and beyond; her frustrations at unsuccessfully gaining promotions (in spite of being qualified for the roles); and being unable to find parity in experiences with a white female mentor she is assigned. Along with other experiences throughout her academic career, Rollock writes that eventually it becomes too much for the character in her fictional account, and it ends by the character being led away by what is assumed to be hospital staff. These studies convey that for both students and staff of colour, educational institutions can be hostile environments precisely because whiteness needs to be constantly navigated to survive and thrive. Yet, through the use of CRT and Black Feminist epistemology, it can facilitate the stories of the Black women in this study to ‘speak back’ to white dominated discourses which often exclude or misrepresent their

experiences (Solarzano and Yosso, 2002; Nadar 2014). On the other hand, institutionalised whiteness excludes groups from the space. Statistical data reveals a stark reality in which BAME people make up 8.3% of the staff in UK universities and 2.9% of UK academic managers, directors and senior officials (Advance HE, 2015b). This picture becomes starker when considering seniority where the demographics of Professors in UK academia equate to 92.39 % (15, 905) being white; 0.49% (85) who are Black and from that only 17 are Black women[41] (Universities and College Unions, 2012). This suggests that barriers extend beyond education and into careers in the academy specifically for Black women. More recently, it was found that there were only 25 Black[42] British women professors (Rollock, 2019). Generally, the lack of BAME, UK based academics has been a cause for concern within research, but especially in regards to their limited career progression in academia which has resulted in the so-called 'ethnic minority academic flight' where many BAME academics seek academic posts abroad (Advance HE, 2015c; Bhopal, 2016b). In many ways, this starkness in BAME staff numbers as a whole but particularly for Black women which is evidenced with the small numbers that reach professor level can indicate how they are impacted by barriers at all levels of education and beyond, particularly in the academy. It will be insightful to understand whether young Black women are aware of these outcomes and whether this impacts upon their educational journeys and experiences.

Moreover, as well as whiteness being institutionalised within given fields, it can also be seen as a form of capital in Bourdieusian terms. For Rampersad (2014: 78), "capital in all its forms is understood as a 'facilitative' vehicle for social accumulation, where having and accessing the 'right' capital can be the difference in social mobility."

[41] As of 2019, there are 25 Black women professors (Rollock, 2019)
[42] Specifically of African and Caribbean descent

This is because the operation of whiteness manifests through privilege (Bhopal, 2018; Bhopal and Chapman, 2019), “unearned power” (Allen, 2004:130) and as the norm (Rose and Paisley, 2012). It is passed down genetically through skin colour but also socialisation (habitus) permitting advantages inaccessible to those who are not white, making it difficult to gain. This stance resonates with CRT’s notions of whiteness as property where it is argued similarly upholds white supremacy, providing advantages and privileges to white people within educational contexts (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Patel, 2015; Annamma 2015, Leonardo, 2013). But whiteness as capital is not just about possessing a resource, but also the value given to said resources based on the whiteness of the owner and the underpinnings of the field it is being used within (Yosso, 2005). It has previously been found that there are differences in results, based upon the racialisation of capitals when deployed in educational contexts (Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Lareau and Horvat, 1999). Vincent et al (2012b: 341-342) assert that this is because “to be effective, the forms of capital have to be recognised as valuable within the particular social arena under consideration [and often] White power holders may refuse to accept as legitimate the capitals held by Black families”. In this way, the marginality experienced by those that are non-white within educational fields are upheld by those racialised as white who, using their whiteness as capital, are able both deploy and determine “whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.),” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:97).

Education Policy

Another way in which whiteness is maintained and reproduced in educational institutions is through policy. According to Gillborn (2005), the centrality of whiteness is ingrained in education policies as a manifestation of white supremacy. He argues that it is insidious, subtle and normalised and, therefore hard to challenge. By this, he asserts that education policies work as "the active structuring of racial inequity," (Gillborn, 2005: 485) through implementing neo-liberal frameworks such as 'raising standards' in schools, where the various ways that schools respond to doing so purposely place Black students at a disadvantage. This is evident in such practices like excluding Black students at higher rates and placing them in lower setting groups and examination tiers (Wright, 2013; Tomlin et al, 2014; Gillborn, 2018; Hamilton, 2018). This is precisely because "policy assumes and defends white supremacy through the priorities it sets, the beneficiaries that it privileges, and the outcomes that it produces," (Gillborn, 2005: 498). This argument is supported by Bhopal (2018) when she maintains that race has been situated as a disadvantage in modern society and sustained by neoliberalism where policies are promoted "for the good of the whole of society rather than a select few," (5). In a similar vein to Gillborn's (2005) assertion about Black students, Madriaga (2018) argues that there are specific forms of racism like antiblackness within English higher educational institutional policy. He shares that, where policy promotes inclusion- which he argues is inefficient, it also fails at "recognising and valuing students, their culture and heritage, but also marking whiteness in everyday lives that castigates Black students as nonhumans," (Madriaga, 2018: 12). In addition, many Black children enter the education system already at a

disadvantage due to the intersections of their race, class and historically disadvantaged communities (Rhamie, 2012: 701). This also supports the need for an intersectional approach and considerations of gender along with race and class when researching Black girls (Strand, 2010: 291). However, it is important to acknowledge that despite "the myriad policies and practices that restrict access of students of colour to high-quality curricular…[and] well-equipped schools…some students of colour have been able to penetrate these barriers to educational opportunity," (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004: 28). In many ways, the Black women within this study are examples of this.

For Black students and specifically Black girls and women, the importance of hair is undeniable (Tate, 2007; Robinson 2011; Oyedemi, 2016; Norwood, 2017; Alubafi et al, 2018; Dalton, 2019). Yet, the policing of Black hair - which are often incorporated within school uniform regulations- is another area which highlights how policy can disproportionately target particular groups to uphold whiteness. Within their paper about the social control of Black hair in English schools, although they centre the hair discrimination case of a Black boy called Chikayzea Flanders due to wearing his hair in dreadlocks; the plight of Black girls and women is not overlooked which is exemplified in the paper's title: *'If Your Hair Is Relaxed, White People Are Relaxed. If Your Hair is Nappy, They're Not Happy.'*[43][44] In the paper, Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly (2018: 4) offer explanations for why the policing of Black hair occurs writing that "hair must…be understood in the context of structural and ideological white supremacy; that is, a socio-racial structure that venerates white European beauty standards, whilst denigrating features associated with the Black body, including hair". Such policies are detrimental to Black students as it results in serious implications for

[43] Paper is titled after a reference from an interview by African-American legendary comedian Paul Mooney
[44] The chemical straightening of Black hair referred to as 'perm' is predominantly done by Black girls and women

their education like exclusion, legal battles and hostile environments until alternative institutions are found or the individual conforms. These policies can also be viewed as institutionally racist because “it can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people” (Macpherson 1999: para 6.34). In a recently released book, Dabiri (2019) extensively discusses the historical importance and politics of Black hair and the struggles that have been encountered by Black people because of their hair. This topic emerged within participant interviews and therefore warrants further analysis as a barrier and challenge encountered by Black women in particular.

The curriculum

The curriculum within educational institutions is another area that privileges and maintains whiteness. This is because it is “a culturally specific artefact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script,” (Ladson-Billings, 1998: 18) and therefore, the exclusion of other races and cultures - despite the important contributions made - are intentional. In fact, Ajegbo et al (2007: 6) find that diverse curriculums operate unevenly across England and the reasons for this are the lack of understanding or confidence of school leaders and teachers about how to incorporate diversity; not prioritising it as important, and the lack of resources to include diversity in a meaningful way. Such findings are disturbing but represent why there are still ongoing debates and challenges taking place within this area (Alexander and Weekes-Bernard, 2017). Swartz (1992: 341) states that one way to systematically

disadvantage particular groups is to silence “multiple voices and perspectives, primarily legitimising dominant, white, upper-class, male voicing as the “standard” knowledge students need to know.” To this effect, as Givens (2016: 1288) maintains, the curriculum, particularly for Black students and the diaspora, are “ideolog[ies] that would stunt their political, economic, and social progress; thus, supporting the goals of white supremacy.”

Within higher education institutions there have been many challenges to the ethnocentric, eurocentric curriculums that dominate degree courses regardless of discipline. These mainly student-led challenges symbolise that:

> “the curriculum represents selections from possible knowledge paradigms and cultures, endowing them with power and status…[and] such selections cannot be imposed without struggle because children come to school [and university] with knowledge and views of the world which encounter contradictions, denials, adjustment and violation through the curriculum and school [and higher education] culture,” (Armstrong, 1998: 147).

Global campaigns such as #RhodesMustFall (Pett, 2015) that implicates universities from South Africa to England, along with ‘Why is My Curriculum White?” (Hussain, 2015) call on universities to decolonise the curriculum (Bhambra et al, 2018; Mirza, 2018); this means that “a decolonised curriculum recognises that Europe does not exist in isolation, that its own knowledge has been produced through centuries of exchange with (and often erasure of) Others,” (Parker, 2018). By incorporating diverse curriculum into educational institutions, it can be said to have wide-ranging implications such as reducing the BAME attainment gap and providing BAME students with a sense of belonging in “institutions where white power structures have long dominated,” (Joseph-Salisbury, 2018).

Impact upon Black women students

Despite the force of whiteness, Black students had the highest proportion of women participating in higher education at undergraduate level (Advance HE, 2018:186-87). Yet, they are underrepresented at elite institutions (Boliver, 2015) and Black women in particular, are least likely to attain 'good'[45]degrees at the end of their time at university (Shilliam, 2015: 33; Advance HE, 2018: 198). This suggests that on the one hand, it can be asserted that young Black British women are committed to education beyond a compulsory level and therefore actively pursue higher education. On the other hand, the kinds of institutions that they do gain access to are often at the bottom in terms of ranking and prestige, which may devalue their credentials and limit their opportunities in an increasingly competitive labour market. As well as this, the lower levels of Black British women achieving First and upper second-class degrees poses questions about their experiences once they enter higher education. Collins (1986) makes the case that Black women have long been located in an 'outsider within' position in academic environments. In other words, although Black women may now have access to academic spaces, they are not fully included and they remain largely invisible with limited voices or power (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Muhummad and Dixson, 2008). Along with this, the pursuit of and participation in higher education for Black women is viewed as being 'journeys into the heart of whiteness' (Casey, 1993; Mirza, 2006b). This means that there are additional demands on their energies which include adjusting to unfamiliar environments that are at odds with their identities and being one of very few Black women students (Henry, 1994; Robertson et al, 2005; Robinson, 2013; Berry and Candis, 2013; Olufemi et al, 2019).

[45] First class degrees or Upper second class (2:1)

Additionally, there are implications that have been found to impact upon Black women at university stage. In a moving paper by Showumni (2017), she uncovers the high costs on mental health and wellbeing that young Black British women eventually encounter after being positioned as educationally resilient. In a number of focus groups and interviews with young Black women - some that were still studying at university and some that had just graduated -they shared the burdens they carried. These included adapting to unfamiliar spaces in the academy: the interplay of racism, classism and sexism within these experiences; the high expectations placed on them by themselves and family members; and frustrations at being unable to find suitable jobs on completion of their degrees. Ultimately, Showumni (2017:1) is exposing how many Black women suffer in silence and are "starting to crumble because they are unable to release the internalised stress that arises from the pressure". Another significant aspect of Black women's participation in higher education is that there is evidence in the US to indicate that Black women engage in varied ways which can be an attribute to differing ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Robinson-Wood, 2009; Murray-Johnson, 2013). To my knowledge, the limited research in Britain does not pay attention to these considerations among Black groups or Black women specifically.

Strategies to succeed

In a similar way to what has been recognised within schooling experiences like the strategies employed for young Black women to progress, there have been a number of strategies used by Black women within higher education. One such strategy is the reliance on support systems which provide sources of assistance with huge

benefits to Black women students. In fact, in the US, Chambers (2011) compiled an entire collection in her edited book to show how support networks are often established based on spirituality and religion (Donahoo, 2011) and specifically designed spaces and resources for young Black women (Suggs and Mitchell, 2011). Further research in the US shows the crucial roles that student affinity groups play for young Black women, for instance as fictive kinship networks (Cook and Williams, 2015); and in the creation of social capital (Greyerbiehl and Mitchell, 2014). The significance of such support systems is that they help to stem Black women's encounters with alienation and isolation, financial constraints, invisibility and loneliness and deliver ways to cope (Ojo, 2009).

While there are similar student societies and groups at universities in the UK like the African and Caribbean Society (ACS), these are not solely for Black women and their remit is dependent on the university where they are based and the society's leadership team. In Britain, my own previous research explored the experiences of Black British women students at a Russell Group University in England (Pennant, 2016). The main findings from my research resonated with the findings from Ojo (2009) in that many of the participants encountered difficulties surviving within a predominantly white, elite institution which was pronounced by the confrontation of cultural shock[46], ethnocentric curriculums and the invisibility (of Black British people) in both the staff and student population. This led to the participants seeking out spaces where they felt like they truly belonged and often led to membership in specific cultural student affinity groups. This membership generated social capital by way of 'people like me', safe spaces and affirmation, all of which they deemed to be missing from the

[46] "the strangeness and discomfort [marginalised students] feel when they matriculate," within predominantly White, elite educational institutions (Torres: 2009: 885). This is in part because of the different raced and classed locations in which these institutions inhabit, which is different to the students'.

wider university. My previous research concluded by emphasising how such student affinity groups represent crucial survival strategies which keep Black women within hostile spaces like predominantly white and elite institutions. As Ojo (2009: 74) states, “the need to acquire alternate resources and support systems becomes an additional quest for survival of many Diasporan women.”

What became apparent in the employment and importance of support systems for Black women in the previous research are the fact that these support systems are often student-led (Ojo, 2009; Robinson-Wood, 2009; Chambers, 2011; Murray-Johnson, 2013; Greyerbiehl and Mitchell, 2014; Pennant, 2016). However, these limited studies convey how instrumental they are and therefore it can be argued that there needs to be more onus on higher education institutions to support them, especially as they are catering to and supplying vital resources that are not seen to be available within the wider university. This feeling is perfectly summed up by Chambers (2011: ix) along with the significance of intersectionality which calls out “the inability of institutional structures to remedy discrimination because of the intersection between social dynamics, which are often conceived of discretely.”

This PhD study is similar to the previous research as it also identifies the ways in which the Black women graduates survived and navigated in their educational journeys. Thus, it builds on this work with a different cohort of Black women who have a range of backgrounds and educational trajectories. Before summarising this chapter and locating my research in the field, the penultimate section will review literature about educational ‘success’.

Understandings of educational 'success'

Within her study about academically successful British South Asian girls, Ludhra (2015: 4) rightly states that "the notion of 'success' is a contested one, and it can be interpreted in various ways beyond academic qualifications and IQ tests". This is because, as previously noted by Mirza (1992, 1997, 2006a; 2006b, 2008) the pursuit of educational success comes at great cost and sacrifice for Black girls and young women who have to survive and navigate within hostile white spaces. Mirza (2008: 136) also asserts that there is a deep connection between race, gender and educational aspirations which she terms 'educational desire' and which is underpinned by 'educational urgency'- "the desire to succeed against the odds" (Mirza, 2008: 144). In a previous study conducted by Coultas (1989), she finds that Black girls and women show a heightened sense of self-confidence and enthusiasm to gaining education. This is similar to what Fuller (1982) discovers where both findings illustrate close connections to a sense of pride in their cultural identities as Black girls with Caribbean heritages. This can demonstrate another strategy that they employ where:

> "black female pupils reproduce their own ideology in the face of racism and they have high self-esteem because they have the support of family, friends and community as a counter-culture to the dominant culture. This leads them to resist, negotiate and sometimes overcome the obstacles to their intellectual development in the British school system. It proves that many black females in schools are highly motivated to learn, despite outward manifestations of disinterest," (Coultas, 1989: 292).

These ideas are echoed by Carter (2008: 478) in the US who discovered that high performing Black students in her study used educational success as an act of resistance. By this, she shares how they developed a 'critical race achievement

ideology' to affirm their Black identities in the midst of a predominantly white, upper class school where, "these black students' psyches are constantly under attack in a learning environment in which their racial group membership is often associated with anti-intellectualism and/or intellectual inferiority". In many ways, Ludhra, Mirza, Coultas, Fuller and Carter highlight that additional effort and energy is a necessary requirement in order for some groups to gain educational success. Additionally, they also suggest how racial as well as gendered identities in the case of Ludhra, Mirza, Coultas and Fuller can be employed as extra resources to facilitate gaining educational success. Other Scholars (Oyserman et al, 2001; Carter, 2003; Modood, 2004; Shah et al, 2010; Hayes, 2013; Henry, 2015; Wallace, 2017a, 2018; Sangster, 2018; Ladier Jr et al, 2019) also advance similar notions about the power and benefits that relying on one's racial and ethnic background can have in acquiring educational 'success'.

On the other hand, within neoliberal contexts, meritocracy and competition are foregrounded as the fairest way for all to gain educational success (Souto-Otero, 2010; Au, 2013; Guinier, 2016; Meroe, 2014; Mijs, 2016); Warikoo, 2016; Crozier, 2018; Rottenburg, 2018). Yet as Hamilton (2018: 3) clarifies, these contexts disadvantage groups like Black Caribbean students because instead of acknowledging and addressing historical racial inequalities, it blames attainment on the individual, positioning them as having "the inability to compete with their counterparts in a meritocratic system". As mentioned in the previous sections, there are many mechanisms such as how race, gender and social class position different students within educational contexts, along with the overwhelming whiteness of educational institutions that continue to marginalise and disadvantage Black students. Ultimately, this will inevitably have an impact upon their performance and whether they are able

to gain educational success as it is currently defined. The model of educational success characterised by individual choice and hard work that 'good' grades and qualifications come to symbolise upholds dominant discourses of success shaped by white middle-class ideals (Yosso, 2005; Spohrer, 2015). This fails to acknowledge or legitimise other forms, or the sacrifices made, against the many odds, to enter and survive within white educational spaces (Love, 2006; Evans and Moore, 2015; Chapman and Bhopal, 2018; Kwakye and Ogunbiyi, 2019; Olufemi et al, 2019). Moreover, for some students, despite achieving educational 'success', they are still unable to acquire the expected advantages they are supposed to acquire (Brynin and Guveli, 2012; Elevation Networks Trust, 2012; Bolivier, 2015; Trades Union Congress, 2016; Khan, 2019). This once again raises further questions about the validity of meritocracy and the value of educational qualifications and 'success' for Black women.

Based on the existing literature about educational success, there is a need to understand it in broader ways that encompass the lived experiences of groups like Black girls and women. Moreover, it suggests that there are limits in the current view of educational success within the boundaries of meritocracy in neoliberal education markets. The final section will bring all of the literature together to locate my research and present the key themes to be explored in this current study.

Summary: locating my research and building on the existing literature

The existing literature has contributed to understandings about some of the central issues relevant to locating the educational journeys and experiences of Black girls and young women within the education system. By focusing on the role of race,

gender and class in educational debates, it has shown that these social constructs can differentially shape experiences within the education system. Even though Black British girls and women are a relatively small group, they are very diverse and encompass those of the African diaspora by way of the Caribbean and Africa; with many born, raised and residing in England as is the case of this research. This has been illustrated with discussions about Black communities in Britain in previous chapters, and later chapters draw upon these discussions as it is an important consideration within this research. Therefore, rather than claiming that all Black British women experience the same situations, as put forward by Collins (2000: 238-39), "intersections of race and gender that frame the category "Black women" generate a shared set of challenges for all women of African descent, however differentially placed in other social hierarchies we may be." Based on this and in agreement with Warmington (2014: 119) who asserts that there is a need "to nuance particular experiences of black girls in British schools," statistical data also shows the diversity among the experiences of Black girls and women. Also, it has illustrated that although Black girls and young women share parts of their identities with groups like Black boys, South Asian and white girls, their experiences are different based on the interactions of their identities and how it is manifests within educational contexts, influenced by gendered, antiblack racism. It also shows that it is important to employ intersectional approaches in order to fully understand the multiplicity of Black British girls and women's identities and the unique challenges within the education system which emerge because of it. Moreover, there needs to be more consideration about the role of antiblackness as a specific form of racism that impacts Black students, as well as the inclusion of class, ethnicity and cultural identities that further differentiate the educational experiences and journeys of Black girls and women. Through exploring

the overwhelming whiteness of educational institutions and the role of policy and the curriculum in maintaining it, this evidences how hostile these spaces can be for Black girls and women. Lastly, understandings about educational 'success' which are closely aligned with meritocracy and 'good' grades hides the additional efforts, energy and commitment that is required to merely survive within hostile places of learning. Therefore, through centring the experiences of Black girls and women it can contribute to expanding these currently limited definitions.

Furthermore, a key limitation that arises from the existing literature is that many of the dedicated studies about Black British girls and young women were conducted in the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, there will inevitably be changes in terms of processes within the education system and intergenerational factors that may alter the findings of more recent research (Frankiln-Brown, 2013; Sangster 2018). In addition, focusing on Black Caribbean experiences does not account for the changing demographics of Black British groups. As Strand (2015) underlines, Black Africans are the largest and one of the fastest growing groups; and the Economist (2016) establishes that "until the turn of the century, Caribbeans were in the majority. But in the ten years to 2011, the African population doubled."

This current study, based on the existing literature, will build upon and contribute updated and recent accounts of the educational journeys and experiences of Black women graduates who represent a new generation. To do this, the entire educational trajectory, from primary school until university will be considered. Additionally, it will utilise and articulate a diverse range of experiences and journeys, as well as adding nuance to Blackness with considerations of ethnicity, cultural background and social class (alongside race and gender), which has seldom been

explored previously. In this way, the key themes to be explored as part of the current research in the subsequent chapters, and to answer the research questions are:

- The influences of race, gender, class and ethnicity/cultural identities in relation to peers and how they operate within the education system
- How the role of whiteness within different types of educational institutions have shaped the Black British women graduates' experiences and journeys
- Educational aspirations, motivations and perceptions of educational 'success'
- Unique challenges and barriers faced, and the strategies used to overcome them

In the next chapter, I will present the methodology that guides and underpins this research.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter sets out the methodology and design for this research. This chapter is divided into three parts. Section one offers a reflection on the ontological and epistemological stances which are inherent features of this research. The second section introduces the participant sample and the recruitment process. It also illustrates the reasoning for selecting the cohort under study, the rationale behind the use of qualitative methods, and the ways the data was collected and analysed. In the final section, the chapter closes with a discussion of my subjective positioning and the ethical considerations as it pertains to the research.

Section One

Ontological and Epistemological stances

I participated in the decolonial Black feminism summer school in Brazil in 2018 and by doing so, I was introduced to crucial and alternative ways in which methodological choices should be made in terms of the historical contexts they emerge from. This strengthened my understandings and reinforced my existing selection of the ontological and epistemological stances as I undertook my research, in the neo-colonial context of the UK:

> "In Westernised universities, the knowledge produced by other epistemologies, cosmologies, and world views arising from other world-regions with diverse time/space dimensions and characterised by different geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge are considered "inferior" in relation to "superior" knowledge produced by the few Western men of five countries that compose the canon of thought in the Humanities and the Social Sciences," (Grosgoguel, 2013: 75).

At the summer school, I engaged in many debates and workshops with academics and fellow (mostly) Black women from across the Americas who were all partaking in similar research (both in the academy and beyond), where Black women and their lived experiences were central. As one of my newly-made friends stressed, such research is "spiritual work as much as it is intellectual because spirituality is the engine of life, turning your feelings into doing," (Ahmed, 2004; Kiwan, 2017; Doharty, 2019). In fact, as Smith (1999: 2) writes, for her, research signifies "a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other."

Therefore, when conducting this kind of educational research about Black British women, it was important to employ suitable philosophical underpinnings that help to guide the direction and thus influence the theoretical frameworks as well as how the data is collected and analysed. I begin by detailing the selected relativist ontological stance shaping this study, and thereafter I introduce Black feminist epistemology.

Relativist Ontology

Mack (2010:5) writes that ontology is "one's view of reality and being," or *what is* and how individuals view the world and interactions within it through these understandings. These understandings are based on personal, educational, political and social standpoints which have developed over time. In relation to research, Bryman (2012: 34) posits that "ontological assumptions and commitments will feed into the ways in which research questions are formulated and research is carried out". However, ontological conflicts have developed (Blaser, 2013; Escobar, 2016) where criticism has been leveled against "the academic practice of relying on disciplinary theories and conceptual debates originating in

and dominated by the West," (Oyewumi, 1997: ix). Therefore, these are inadequate when considering the *many* "views of reality and being" as put forward by Mack (2010: 5). In this way, the focus on Black British women graduates within this study is in large part shaped by my own understandings and experiences of the education system, as illustrated within the introductory chapter. These understandings and experiences are highly influenced by factors such as my raced, gendered and classed identities as well as the types of educational institutions I attended. As such, this awakened my curiosity about the potential role of these identities within diverse educational institutions in shaping others' trajectories and outcomes within the education system. This curiosity defined my research questions and led me to a relativist ontological position as this acknowledges that there are multiple realities that are socially constructed and influenced largely by social, ethnic, gender, economic and political positionalities (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). For Levers (2013: 2), "the purpose of science from a relativist ontology is to understand the subjective experience of reality and multiple truths," as is the aim of this study. In turn, my research is located in a critical paradigm where it seeks to "…challenge…reproductions of inequalities…and dominant discourses," (Mack, 2010: 9). By recognising that there are multiple ways of knowing, as will be illustrated by the narratives of the Black British women regarding their educational journeys and experiences in this study; this centering highlights that "we have our own research needs and priorities. Our questions [and voices] are important [and] research helps us to answer them," based on our own realities (Smith, 1999: 199).

Given what has been discussed regarding ontology, I will now justify my reasoning for selecting a Black feminist epistemology next.

Black Feminist Epistemology

Epistemology essentially means "how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated" (Scotland, 2012: 9) or *what it means to know.* When concentrating on the educational journeys and experiences of Black British women graduates who are often positioned as *outsiders within*[47] (Collins, 1986), it is important to ground such research within an epistemology which "reflects the interests and standpoints of its creators," as well as those that are under study (Collins, 2000: 251). Black feminist epistemology seeks to centre the lived experiences of Black women by facilitating the production of what is deemed to be specialised knowledge (Collins, 1986, Collins 2000, Reynolds, 2002)[48]. In this way, it disrupts the master narrative defining which knowledge is valued and who is able to produce it (Nadar, 2014). The main tenets of Black feminist epistemology are:

1. *Lived experience as a criterion of meaning*- the idea that knowledge claims made by Black women who have first-hand encounters about what they share and can also cite examples increases credibility.

2. *The use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims*- the belief that the creation of new knowledge by Black women is hardly created in a vacuum, rather it is the product of dialogue between individuals and members of the community which acts to validate the new knowledge.

3. T*he ethics of caring*- the importance of invoking "personal expressiveness, emotions and empathy," (263) to validate knowledge.

[47] this means that although Black women are able to gain entry and participate within academic settings, they still occupy marginal positions as they are either invisible or unheard within the dialogue within these settings (Howard-Hamilton. 2003: 21)

[48] This space comes out of the work of Saidiya Hartman (1997; 2007; 2019), Sylvia Wynter (1962; 1995; 2003); Katherine McKittrick (2006; 2007); Dorothy Roberts (1997; 2003; 2011), Angela Davis (1981;1989;1998) and Gail Lewis (2000) to name a few, whose theories and practices contribute to Black feminist theory, which sits within Black feminist epistemology. I recognise that the citing of Black women is critical and crucial and therefore, I acknowledge their work and contributions (Ahmed, 2017; Smith, 2017). However, within this thesis, I draw heavily on the work of Collins.

4. *The ethics of personal accountability*- the notion that knowledge claims cannot just be made, there also needs to be consideration of the individual's values, ethics and character to assess it.

5. *Black women as agents of knowledge*- facilitating Black women in the creation of their own knowledge to both speak to/for and self-define themselves.

Collins (2000: 251- 269)

It is through the use of Black feminist epistemology when studying Black British women graduates that a detailed representation of their lived experiences and journeys within the education system will be illustrated. In particular, it highlights the structural inequalities in the education system, the unique struggles and challenges that Black British women encounter and how they navigate. Moreoever, it asserts the importance of intersectionality within research which can better understand the experiences of Black British women within the education system (Lane, 2017: 14). In addition, the significance of employing this epistemology is that:

> "the existence of a self-defined Black women's standpoint using Black feminist epistemology calls into question the content of what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth."
>
> Collins (2000: 271)

It must be noted that Black Feminist epistemology has some weaknesses too. Reynolds (2002: 601) has critiqued the domination of African-American perspectives and how "the inherent danger with this USA-dominated knowledge is black women's experiences elsewhere in the world receive limited theoretical consideration in the production of a black feminist standpoint". The differing histories, race categories, minority experiences and migration patterns in the US and the UK are important areas to bear in mind within research- as with any tools developed elsewhere. This is also pointed out by

Young (2000: 48) when she writes that there needs to be caution about "the extent to which black American feminism is applicable in a British context."

However, there has been an expansion of Black Feminist scholarship evidenced with the growing body of Black British feminism. In *Black British Feminism* (1997), Mirza along with her contributors highlight similar plights that are experienced within Britain by women of colour. Yet, it must be noted that this also presents a slight variation from American Black feminism where African-American women (also referred to as Black) are the central focus within it. In Britain, at times, Black British feminism encompasses a wide range of groups which is exemplified in the work undertaken by Mirza (1997: 3) when she writes:

> "What defines us as Pacific, Asian, Eastern, African, Caribbean, Latina, Native, and 'mixed race' 'others' is not our imposed 'minority' status, but our self-defining presence as people of the postcolonial diaspora…we stand out, we are visibly different and that is what makes us 'black.'"

While this evidences Mirza's engagement with postcolonial theory and Political Blackness, I specifically chose to focus on the experiences of Black British women of African and Caribbean heritage. This is especially significant and important to bear in mind when "anti-black racism became the foundational constitutive structuring logic of the modern/colonial world," (Grosfoguel, 2013: 84). Therefore, I strongly align and incorporate Black Feminist epistemology- despite its origins in the US, because in contrast to Black *British* feminism which is inclusive of *all* women of colour[49], the origins of Black feminism in the US as well as its focus is "women of African descent who identify as African American women, Afro-Caribbean women, Nigerian American women, Black British Women, Afro-Brazilian women, and women who claim blackness in combination with other racial identifications," (Collins, 2016: 135). This research, then, has the potential to contribute and

[49] Please note that there is nothing wrong with these powerful coalitions

expand Black British feminism, by being specific and paying attention to the educational experiences of Black British women graduates.

It is within the context of Black Feminist epistemology that my thesis draws on the theories of CRT and BTP to articulate specific elements of the Black women's experiences[50]. In a similar vein to CRT, Black Feminist epistemology also positions Black women's voices centrally when exploring and naming their experiences. In this way, a Black feminist epistemology and Critical Race Theory work hand in hand, especially as both challenge Eurocentric epistemologies and instead aim to "offer a liberatory pedagogy that encourages inquiry, dialogue, and participation from a wide variety of stakeholders," (Taylor, 2009: 10). Such voices are crucial and should be heard and so, techniques such as storytelling facilitate the creation of counter-narratives. Ladson-Billings (1998: 13) elaborates further by expressing that "the use of voice or "naming one's reality" is a way that CRT links form and substance in scholarship".

Section Two

Sampling and Recruitment

Due to the cohort with whom I wished to engage for this study, I started by being purposeful in terms of my selection criteria and where I advertised. In this way, I employed a mixture of snowball and purposive sampling which are frequently used within this kind of research where the sample under study is often very specific (Goodson and Sikes, 2001:24-25). The characteristics and attributes that I looked for were Black (African/Caribbean descent), British (born and/or raised), women who had participated in the English education

[50] See appendix 8 (page 347) for a diagram and explanation about the operations of the ontology, epistemology and theoretical frameworks

system- from primary school until university- and had graduated between 2014-2017 from an English university.

My recruitment drive included use of my personal social media accounts (e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp) where I uploaded the recruitment poster[51] alongside information about my study and contact details for interested parties. Through social media, I also posted in relevant online groups. Additionally, I emailed different social networks where Black British women were substantial numbers of the membership and asked them to distribute my email[52] and recruitment poster amongst their members[53]. I also contacted other networks with wider audiences[54] and I printed the recruitment poster and placed them on notice boards in public spaces like libraries and Black cultural community hubs in the South East and West Midlands.

Participants

I interviewed 25 graduates over the course of this research. This was a suitable number of participants for purposive sampling, reinforced by the recurring themes that began to emerge within interviews indicating 'saturation' (Guest et al, 2006). The participants self-defined as Black and more specifically within "African Diasporic Blackness" (Andrews, 2016: 2063), comprising of Black British women with African or Caribbean heritage born and/or residing in England.[55]

[51] See appendix 1 (page 334)
[52] See appendix 2 (page 335)
[53] These networks included: Women in the City Afro-Caribbean Network (WCAN), the National Black Women's Network (NBWN), the Black Women's Forum UK and the Black Women of Birmingham organisation
[54] Such as the Black and Asian Studies Association, the Network for Black & Asian Professionals and the British Black Studies mailing list
[55] There is one participant, Rachel, who is mixed-race with African-American roots and has one Black parent. She was included as she is of African descent and this research reflects a principle of self-definition (Tate, 2005). Therefore, I did not exclude Rachel but embraced her experiences of her Black womanhood along her educational journey.

Initially and in line with *The Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE)* (2016) survey, the aim of the study was to include Black British women who had graduated within 6 months to 1-year. However, this limited the scope of potential participants significantly and therefore, this period was extended to include Black British women who had graduated between 2014 and 2017. This time period meant that participants were still relatively new graduates and therefore would have a strong recollection of their educational journeys and experiences. As graduates, the Black British women participants have reached the end of the traditional education trajectory for many in England. Moreover, depending on when they had graduated, they may have begun to carve out and establish their careers, which may provide additional depth in the retrospective accounts they shared.

The decision to focus on Black *British* women graduates was made to explicitly focus on the educational experiences and journeys of a group which has been under-researched. It was further noted that there are distinctions between the experiences of BAME international students and British BAME students within higher educational institutions which are central within previous studies (Schweisfurth and Gu 2009, Elliot et al 2015, Newsome and Cooper 2016). In addition, the buzzword, 'diversity'[56] is often used in research and university promotion to show how multicultural university campuses are, yet it is international students on campuses that are often used to represent this. The focus on the English education system rather than Britain or the United Kingdom was to uphold a level of consistency in the educational accounts shared by participants because of the differences in education systems between the countries of the UK. For instance, differences include Scotland having separate qualifications to England, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as following their own curriculum along with Northern Ireland (The SchoolRun, 2019). Differences are also apparent within post-16 and higher education. The participants have all

[56] "Diversity can imply a set of powerful social and political values including social inclusion, anti-elitism, responsiveness to new audiences, greater student choice and participative forms of teaching," (Taylor, 2003)

been successful in navigating and meeting the various benchmarks along the way which are demonstrated by the educational qualifications they have all acquired. Moreover, as Black British women are part of the 1.84 million[57] British undergraduates participating in higher education each year (Universities UK, 2017), their accounts will be important for ongoing discussions and debates about new graduates (Ware 2015, O'Leary and Sloane 2016, Allen 2015, Espinoza 2015), especially due to the specificity of their identities and experiences.

The participant table below briefly summarises the key details about the 25 participating Black British women graduates within this study. Moreover, in centring the voices of Black women within Black Feminist epistemology as well as in CRT, I provide short participant biographies that they wrote themselves in the appendices[58]. I have intentionally left the self-defined ethnic/cultural background and social class of each participant unchanged, again as a way to allow them to self-define who they are and how they would like to be represented which is another important feature of Black Feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990). I have also deliberately selected some culturally-specific pseudonyms to reflect the heritages of the participants and to evoke connections between Black British women and this research.

The table shows that the diverse participants who are different ages and come from a variety of ethnic and cultural as well as socio-economic backgrounds. They have also come from a range of educational institutions from state and/or private schools to further education colleges and sixth forms, to elite or post-1992 universities. This diverse cohort of Black British women graduates is another distinct feature of this research.

[57] Based on the year 2015-2016
[58] See appendix 3 (page 336)

Table 1- Participant Information table:

	Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity/Cultural background*	Social Class*	Type of educational institutions attended*	Type of university attended*
1	Grace	24	Nigerian-British	Lower middle-class	*Primary school*: MC, state *Secondary school:* PW, state boarding *Post-16 education*: remained in secondary school for sixth form provision	Pre-1992 university
2	Camille	21	African- Angolan	Working-class	*Primary school*: PW, State *Secondary school:* PW, State *Post-16 education:* PW, State sixth form college	Post-1992 university
3	Kemi	24	Nigerian-British	Working-class	*Primary school*: MC, state *Secondary school:* MC, state *Post-16 education:* PW, grammar school sixth form	Pre-1992 university
4	Adeola	26	Nigerian	Lower middle-class	*Primary school*: MC, state *Secondary school*: PW, private *Post-16 education:* PW, grammar school sixth form	Pre-1992 university
5	La'Shay	26	Black British Jamaican	Middle-class	*Primary school:* MC, State *Secondary school:* PW, Grammar *Post-16 education:* MC, State sixth form college	Pre-1992 university
6	Deja	23	Black British Caribbean	Working-class	*Primary school:* MC, Private *Secondary school:* PW, Grammar *Post-16 education:* remained in secondary school for sixth form provision	Pre-1992 university

7	Dionne	34	Black Caribbean	Working-class	*Primary school:* MC, State *Secondary school:* MC, State *Post-16 education:* MC, State, FE college	Post-1992 university
8	Joy	23	British Ghanaian	Middle-class	*Primary school:* PW, State *Secondary school:* PW, Grammar *Post-16 education:* remained in secondary school for sixth form provision	Elite University
9	Rachel	23	Mixed- African-American and Ashkenazi Jewish	Middle-class	*Primary school: MC*, State *Secondary school:* PW, State *Post-16 education: PW,* State sixth form college	Pre-1992 university
10	Jumoke	23	Black British of Nigerian heritage	Middle-class	*Primary school:* PW, Private *Secondary school:* PW, Grammar *Post-16 education:* remained in secondary school for sixth form provision	Pre-1992 university
11	Takara	23	African Caribbean	Lower middle-class	*Primary school:* MC, State *Secondary school:* MC, State *Post-16 education:* MC, State sixth form college	Pre-1992 university
12	Chanel	24	Black British	Working-class	*Primary school:* MC, State *Secondary school:* MC, State *Post-16 education:* MC, State, sixth form college	Pre-1992 university
13	Yasmin	24	Black Caribbean	Lower middle-class	*Primary school:* PW, State *Secondary school:* PW, State *Post-16 education:* MC, state, sixth form college	Pre-1992 university
14	Afua	24	Ghanaian	Working-class	*Primary school:* MC, State	Pre-1992 university

					Secondary school: MC, State *Post-16 education:* MC, State, Sixth form college	
15	Rochelle	25	Black British	Working-class	*Primary school:* MC, State *Secondary school:* PW, State *Post-16 education:* MC, State, FE college	Post-1992 university
16	Beverley	24	Nigerian and Black	Working-class	*Primary school:* MC, State *Secondary school:* MC, State *Post-16 education:* Apprenticeship in workplace	Pre-1992 university
17	Claudia	24	British Ghanaian	Working-class	*Primary school:* MC, state *Secondary school:* PW, private *Post-16 education:* remained in secondary school for sixth form provision	Elite university
18	Makeda	24	Black Caribbean	Lower middle-class	*Primary school:* MC, state *Secondary school:* MC, state *Post-16 education:* MC, State, FE college	Pre-1992 university
19	Sophia	25	Black British	Working-class	*Primary school:* MC, state *Secondary school:* MC, state *Post-16 education:* remained in secondary school for sixth form provision	Pre-1992 university
20	Ebony	25	British with Jamaican and Guyanese heritage	Lower middle-class	*Primary school:* MC, state *Secondary school:* PW, private *Post-16 education:* MC, State, sixth form college	Elite University
21	Halima	21	Black African	Working-class	*Primary school*: PW, State *Secondary school:* PW, State	Elite University

					Post-16 education: MC, State, sixth form college	
22	Shakirah	23	British Jamaican	Working-class	*Primary school:* PW, state *Secondary school:* PW state and MC state *Post-16 education:* MC, State, FE college	Post-1992 university
23	Simone	21	Caribbean British	Working-class	*Primary school:* MC, State *Secondary school:* MC, State *Post-16 education:* remained in secondary school for sixth form provision	Elite University
24	Estelle	23	African Caribbean	Middle-class	*Primary school:* MC, State *Secondary school:* PW, Grammar *Post-16 education:* remained in secondary school for sixth form provision	Elite University
25	Janaya	22	Caribbean	Working-class	*Primary school:* MC, State *Secondary school:* MC, State *Post-16 education:* MC, State, FE college	Post-1992 university

Table 2- Participant Information table key

*Participants self-defined their ethnic/cultural backgrounds and social class which will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters

MC= multicultural institutions that have higher proportions of pupils and students from diverse racial, ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds.

PW= predominantly white institutions that have higher proportions of white pupils and students and few students from diverse racial, ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds.

State= institutions that are funded by the English government, adhere to certain regulations like following the national curriculum and are usually non academically selective.

Grammar = institutions that are funded by the English government but are academically selective where an 11+ exam needs to be passed for entrance

Private= institutions that are fee-paying, usually academically selective and independent of finance and regulations from the English government

Sixth form college/ FE college = dedicated institutions for the study of a wide range of post-16 academic and vocational qualifications

*To uphold confidentiality and to group universities with similar characteristics:

Post- 1992 university = institutions that were given university status in the Further and Higher education Act (1992) which were (mainly) previously polytechnics. They are also known as new universities and/or modern universities.

Pre-1992 university = the newly created and/or expanded institutions in the 1960s which were called for in the Robbins Report (1963). Beloff (1968) refers to these as 'plate-glass universities' which he used to describe the different building and architectural style that characterised these institutions

Elite university= the Russell group of universities which are "24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best in research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector (Russell Group, 2019). They tend to have higher entry tariffs compared to other universities and the prestigious reputations of the institutions open up many opportunities for alumni in the labour market.

Defining, justifying and employing qualitative research

As the purpose of this study is to explore and understand the educational journeys and experiences of Black British women graduates in their own words, qualitative methods were deemed to provide the best way to facilitate this. Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 3) define qualitative research as:

> "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices…turn the world into a series of representations including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them".

More specifically, I also employ elements that are integral to heuristic inquiry, also qualitative in nature. Within heuristic research, both the understanding of the participants and the topic under study are key as well as the researcher's position and motivations which are clearly noted and situated during the research process. This is illustrated within the introductory chapter where I share my own educational journey. According to Moustakas (1990: 11) "from the beginning and throughout an investigation, heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery." In this way, autoethnographic recollections are key to discern how research is conducted and the topic under study because "with virtually every question that matters personally, there is also a social- and perhaps universal- significance," (Moutaskas, 1990: 15). This can also be viewed as one way that the researcher is

being reflexive about their own positionality and experiences and how this influences the research process. By asking participants to write short biographies, I encouraged them to take part in this process too. However, this reflexivity and the researcher including their own experiences within qualitative research has been criticised as there is "the danger of over indulgence of the 'self'," (Lamb, 2013: 85). This will be discussed in the reflexivity section in this chapter.

While there are merits to undertaking qualitative research, there are also some issues that should be considered before, during and after such research. Firstly, there are debates surrounding how to extract relevant material from qualitative methods, how social reality is to be constructed (ontology), how knowledge is obtained and what 'truth' actually is (epistemology) (Snape and Spencer, 2003: 11-14). In addition, there are some concerns around the reliability and validity of qualitative research. Based on a Black Feminist epistemology and a CRT framework, the application of a solely qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate for the topic under study as it deems the narratives of the Black women to be valid.

After weighing the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research, due to the aims of this study, qualitative research was selected as the best way to answer the research questions. This is because it attends to the meanings and interpretations that individuals assign to events in their lives, and best addresses the research questions. Moreover, in order to gain fuller understandings, the use of semi-structured interviews was decided upon.

Improvising Black women's accounts through semi-structured interviews[59]

As the purpose of this study is to capture a comprehensive picture of Black British women graduates' experiences of the English education system, semi-structured interviews were identified as the most appropriate method to achieve this. According to Webb and Webb (1932: 130) semi-structured interviews are "conversations with a purpose," and they can be characterised as more relaxed and in-depth than structured interviews but more focused than unstructured interviews. This is because although the interviews have a purpose of eliciting relevant information about particular topics that have been identified in a pre-planned interview guide, there is room to probe further about what is shared by the participant which offers a chance to gain additional in-depth insights (Robson, 2011). Semi-structured interviews are often conducted face-to-face and one-to-one which is the same approach taken within this study. However, it is not unusual for semi-structured interviews to be conducted using other modes such as the telephone and video calling (Irvine et al, 2012), as well as having multiple interviewers and interviewees present during an interview (Arksey and Knight, 1999). As a qualitative method, Warren (2002: 98) highlights the unique nature involved in this type of interviewing when she writes how the social interaction that occurs is akin to "the perspectives of the interviewer and the respondent danc[ing] together for the moment but also extend[ing] outward in social space and backward and forward in time." This refers to influences such as identities, experiences and feelings of the interviewer and interviewee which are imbued and greatly shape the direction of the interviews, what is shared within them and how the data is interpreted.

[59] To avoid confusion, I refer specifically to semi-structured interviews, given that "there is a growing tendency for semi-structured…interviewing to be referred to collectively as *in-depth* or as *qualitative interviews,*" [emphasis in original] (Bryman (2012: 471).

Before carrying out a semi-structured interview, an interview guide[60][61] is compiled which typically includes: "introductory comments (probably a verbatim script); list of topic headings and possibly key questions to ask under these headings; set of associated prompts; and closing comments," (Robson, 2011: 285).

While the interview guide is an important instrument, it merely acts as a *guide* and the interviewer is not expected to follow it strictly. This stage in the process can be seen as *one* of the most time-consuming parts (Rabionet, 2011: 564); beaten only by the time taken to fully transcribe each interview. When compiling the interview guide for this study, I often referred back to the overall research questions, focusing on the main components of what I was seeking to discover from participants in the interviews. Smith (1995: 12) recognises the benefits of creating an interview guide beforehand when he acknowledges how it "forces you to think explicitly about what you think/hope the interview might cover." In this way, the main topics that became the focal points of the interview guide were educational journeys and experiences; key decisions and choices; the role of family and extended networks; and the roles of race, ethnicity, cultural background, gender and social class for the Black British women graduates. These main topics were then broken down into smaller parts to gain detailed insights for instance, the participants' educational journeys and experiences were divided into sections to look at each stage and to give time to discuss primary schooling, secondary schooling, sixth form/college and university memories separately. Many of the questions in the interview guide were open-ended and that allowed the interviewees to respond however they wished. One advantage of having such questions is that unusual responses can be given by respondents; on the other hand, as the respondent has more freedom in how they choose to reply, this can be more time consuming as

[60] See appendix 4 (page 345)
[61] Or interview schedule as it is also referred to

they may talk for longer than expected (Bryman, 2012: 246-247). Once a working interview guide was developed, it was revised a number of times after it had been piloted on numerous occasions.

Another important consideration when employing this method is the interviewing style and technique of the interviewer which can greatly impact the success of interviews. This can be quite a task as Fielding and Thomas (2008: 253) warn as "interviewers need very effective communication skills to make the interaction "natural" while keeping an eye on the interview guide and helping respondents stay on topic." In the same vein, Arksey and Knight (1999: 39) interpret the interviewer as:

> "a jazz musician in a jam session. The key may have been set and there is an initial theme: thereafter it is improvisation. Your ability to 'jam' is crucial to the success of these interviews, since there will be times when it will be right to improvise".

These improvisations include being able to bring the interview back on track when it goes in a different and irrelevant direction, explaining in more detail or even changing the wording of questions to facilitate the respondent to answer with ease, and being able to probe and prompt with follow-up questions in an effortless manner. Although this may sound quite simple to do, it is often dependent on the level of rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee. Commenting on rapport, Thomas (2013: 195) notes that "establishing rapport is not simply a mechanical process to be gone through; it is a process of actually making contact- of proving that you are actually human- and this can be much more difficult in some cases than others." Within this study, efforts at building rapport were made by attempting to make the participant comfortable by introducing myself and the research in as much detail as possible, which helped to take away the official nature of taking part in a PhD research study.

In addition, having conversations and encouraging participants to ask questions before the interviews, as well as by conducting the interviews in neutral, easily accessible places meant that rapport was established. This also meant that participants were given the opportunity **not** to adopt formal language and to use their own cultural capital (Yosso, 2005; Wallace 2017a), to express their experiences within interviews through code-switching (Boulton, 2016; Lewis, 2018). Ultimately, interviewing is a skill (Robson, 2011: 301) and as stipulated by Arksey and Knight (1999), before undertaking semi-structured interviews, it is imperative that the interviewer understands people, including themselves, which will help with how they conduct the interviews and relate to the respondents. This contributes to self-awareness about body language and facial expressions which has the potential to skew how respondents may answer questions and behave within interviews.

There are many strengths associated with using semi-structured interviewing within research. In an article by Rabionet (2011: 563), he describes qualitative interviewing[62] as "a flexible and powerful tool to capture voices and the ways people make meaning of their experiences." Indeed, one of the major strengths of semi-structured interviews is the flexibility it provides in extracting relevant information for the topic under study. Within interviews, often additional prompts, probes and questions are a common feature and the interview is in no set order (Bryman, 2012). Another strength when carrying out face-to-face semi-structured interviews is that it is easier to develop rapport unlike when using a telephone (Irvine et al, 2012), and the interviewer is able to notice and sense any confusion, body language and emotions which may be conveyed by the respondent (Thomas, 2013). This enables the interviewer to adapt accordingly for instance, to check on the interviewee's well-being

[62] in which semi-structured interviews are one form of

or their comprehension (see ethical considerations). Moreover, attention to small details like behaviour can add additional value when analysing the interviews. A further strength of this method is the significant role that is placed on the participant where they “share more closely in the direction the interview takes and he or she can introduce an issue the interviewer had not thought of. In this relationship, the respondent can be perceived as an expert on the subject and should therefore be allowed maximum opportunity to tell his or her own story,” (Smith, 1999: 12). This can produce richer and insightful data.

However, there are also weaknesses when it comes to employing semi-structured interviewing. One such weakness is the interviewer effect where the interviewer can be seen to have a great influence on the course of the interview, as well as on both validity and reliability. There are two elements of the interviewer effect, one was demonstrated firstly by Hyman (1954) and later by Sudman and Bradburn (1982) when they discovered the importance of the interviewer having a similar identity to the interviewees. This was because they found in their studies that it often generated completely different responses for instance, white interviewers would get more socially acceptable answers from Black respondents compared to the white respondents they interviewed. This skewed the data and meant that interviewers were not getting true insights into the topic under study. But the merits of matching interviewers and interviewees is under debate too as this can also impact how the interview is conducted. For instance, it has been shown in previous studies that being in the same racial category as the interviewee does not negate additional differences that remain, such as age and social class (Kennedy-Macfoy, 2013) as well as family background and structure (Dunbar Jr et al, 2002). These issues are discussed in more detail within the reflexivity section of this chapter. Likewise, the second element of the

interviewer effect are issues of reliability in that “there are also limits to interviewer’s ability to conduct interviews the same way every time, and the differences in the respondents and the interview context [which] may make it less meaningful to think in terms of similarity,” (Fielding and Thomas, 2008: 256).

Another weakness of this method is the time-consuming nature of it. This is confirmed by Arksey and Knight (1999: 60-61) who evidence three stages that need to be completed when conducting semi-structured interviews. These are: (1) the preparatory work such as recruiting interviewees and booking places to undertake interviews; (2) the interview sessions which vary in length along with transcription that can take hours per interview; lastly (3) the analysis and interpretation of the large amounts of interview data. These processes can be extended further if for instance follow-up interviews take place.

A further weakness regarding semi-structured interviewing can be the commitment of respondents who are central to the success of this method. Gaining the commitment of a potential participant hinges on many factors such as whether there are incentives to participate, whether they have enough time to dedicate to interviews and the degree of their connection to the topic under study. Moreover, as semi-structured interviews tend to be longer in length, Axinn and Pearce (2006: 42) reported that at times this can create ‘respondent fatigue’ which may deter respondents from continuing. However, as there was only one interview per participant in this study, this was not an issue.

It is important to note that before firmly deciding upon semi-structured interviewing for this study, alternative qualitative methods were considered. The main alternative was a life history approach which also aligns closely to the purposes of this research in enabling a detailed and comprehensive picture to be created about Black

British women graduates' experiences of the education system. By way of illustration, Legard et al (2003: 141) shows how life history approaches "are concerned with understanding cultural milieux and social worlds through personal accounts and narratives, with life history…interviews covering an individual's whole life." This approach also includes in-depth interviews where a timeline is an important element to capture key moments of an individual's life to be further discussed. While benefits of using this approach include the rich data it produces, it can be argued that it would be more useful when focusing on the lived experiences of one or very few numbers of participants. Great examples of these are seen in the previous works of Shostak (1983), Brown (1991), Behar (1993). As there is a clear focus for this study which is the educational experiences and journeys of Black British women graduates, it can be said that an individual's account of their entire life may not straightaway yield relevant information in this regard. It is true that contextual information to locate participants within wider cultural milieux can enhance the research yet, this can be gained through specific questions in semi-structured interviews as well as when interview data is analysed and interpreted. By way of the participants' short biographies, I have sought to provide these wider cultural milieux. Moreover, life history approaches have strong storytelling and oral traditions which are key parts of many cultures- especially African diasporic ones (Hoyles and Hoyles, 2002) and are encouraged within Black Feminist epistemology and Critical Race Theory (CRT) research. Using storytelling can facilitate the sharing of educational journeys and experiences in natural, enjoyable and straightforward ways for participants. Still, depending on the structure of semi-structured interviews, it can be argued that participants still have the opportunity to engage in narration when recounting their educational journeys and experiences. Last but not least, the principles that guide life history research as outlined by Cole and

Knowles (2001: 27-43) which include relationality; mutuality; empathy and care; sensitivity and respect are not exclusive to this approach and in fact, can be discovered within semi-structured interviews.

In general, and considering the points that have been discussed regarding semi-structured interviews, the benefits of using semi-structured interviewing outweigh the drawbacks. Additionally, semi-structured interviews as a method are in line with Black Feminist epistemology where dialogue is key for sharing experiential knowledge as well as within Critical Race Theory (CRT) which upholds the value and importance of the voices of people of colour in research, to create counter-stories.

Data Collection

As illustrated previously, data collection occurred through one-to-one semi-structured interviews between each of the 25 participants and me, described by Goodson (2001) as a grounded conversation. To accommodate my participants, I travelled to meet with them to conduct interviews in many different settings across the South East and the West Midlands, at mutually convenient dates and times, usually weekday evenings after participants had finished work. These settings included pre-booked rooms in libraries, a school, a therapy organisation's building and workspace within a cultural community hub. In total, 25 interviews were carried out lasting varying lengths but approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. With the permission of each participant, interviews were all audio-recorded and after each interview the recordings were transcribed verbatim. Due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, they were in-depth and in order to keep the interviews focused I developed an initial interview

schedule to build a flexible structure. As I was interested in the educational journeys and experiences of Black women graduates, the main areas that I wished to explore with each participant were who they are (personal history), their educational experiences and journeys (primary and secondary schooling, college/sixth form and university) and the key influences within their experiences and journeys in education (family, friends/extended networks, teachers/lecturers).The interviews involved open-ended, broad questions related to the research topic and although there was flexibility and participants did share an array of stories, efforts on my behalf were made to ensure that they linked back to the topics. At the end, participants were asked about how they thought the interviews went and answers ranged from “It felt really good” to “It really wasn’t how I expected it to be” to “I have never thought about *x* in that way before”. Moreover, many of the participants then proceeded to probe and ask me about my own educational experiences and journeys which I was happy to share. This also strengthened rapport and evidenced my motivations for conducting such a study.

Pilot interviews

I carried out two pilot interviews with interviewees separate to the main study that I recorded and transcribed. The first pilot was very useful as it showed that the initial questions did not delve into the key parts of what I wished to find out regarding educational experiences and journeys. In addition, the questions did not flow well due to the wording and the order. I was also able to gain valuable feedback from the first participant about the ways I could improve future interview questions. Suggestions included changing the order when talking about educational journeys and instead of

starting from university and working backwards, a better fit was beginning from primary schooling and working our way forward to university experiences. Also, more detailed questions and probes were required to create a better picture of educational experiences and journeys. This was created through more questions regarding the participants personal history which I revised to extend to their ethnicity and cultural backgrounds, self-definition of their social class which included their parents' backgrounds, occupations and education level, as well as considerations about siblings. Moreover, I gave more time for exploring different aspects of each of their educational experiences as mentioned previously and more questions were added in relation to primary schooling, secondary schooling and sixth form/college experiences. During this pilot interview, I was made aware about the need to make sure my questions were clear and that depending on the participant, follow-up questions were key to generating more information to extract a greater amount of data.

The second pilot interview was also very valuable, as not only did it provide a lot of depth, but I was also able to assess the ways in which I could edit and add further revisions. Additionally, within this final pilot interview, the participant became very emotional throughout the interview. This consideration was made when completing the ethics application as I realised that some participants may have had unpleasant educational experiences and journeys that participating in interviews may trigger. The emotional nature of the participant prepared me to handle this if it happened again during 'real' interviews. In that instance, I comforted the participant, gave them the opportunity to take a break and reassured them that they did not have to continue. Once this final pilot was completed, I again revised the interview questions for instance, I deleted some questions which seemed to repeat previous ones and I added questions such as whether they went straight to university from sixth form/college, all

which would provide important details which helped when it came to analysing the data.

Data Analysis

I managed the data I had collected with the use of the qualitative computer software NVivo, onto which all of my transcriptions were uploaded. This was useful due to the huge sum of interview data that was collected and meant that my interviews could all be stored in one place and annotated more easily. According to Armstrong (1987:23), "data collection and data analysis are overlapping, not discrete, stages of research," and as stated previously, through the many detailed transcriptions I completed of my semi-structured interviews, I became familiar with my data as the beginning stages of analysis occurred.

The ontological and epistemological stances as well as the theoretical frameworks[63] I employed, assisted in making sense and interpreting the data I had collected with multidimensional analysis and a blend of theories to articulate aspects of the Black British women graduates' educational experiences and journeys. I was able to see more clearly and link my data back accordingly, when for instance I was confronted by the influence of ethnicity and cultural, raced, gendered and classed identities along participants educational experiences and journeys, and how this shaped the routes they chose or the types of extended networks they utilised to provide vital support to some participants. While Black feminists and Critical Race theorists point to the operations of racism and the need for intersectional approaches that can help to situate the experiences of the Black British women graduates;

[63] Please see appendix 8 (page 352) of the diagram that is a visual representation of how the ontological, epistemological and theoretical frameworks work together

Bourdieu's theory of practice was applied to understand how for example, some of the Black British women graduates who had come from deprived areas, with parents that had limited knowledge of the education system were not necessarily equipped with appropriate levels of capitals needed at key stages in their educational journeys (Watson, 2013; Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013).

A process of thematic analysis is the best way to describe how the data was disseminated and the nodes[64] or themes that were initially made into a mindmap and then this was narrowed down and formed the structure of the subsequent chapters. This is similar to how Edwards and Weller (2012: 204) analysed the data from their qualitative longitudinal research where analysis was led by the data and involved "identifying key topics and patterns, regularities and contrasts, in the material in order to create interpretive meaning." In addition, I formulated the interview data into case studies and looked for what Denzin (1989: 129) refers to as "epiphanies" which are "existentially problematic moments in the lives of individuals." They present themselves in four main ways which he describes in detail:

> "First, there are those moments that are major and touch every fabric of a person's life. Their effects are immediate and long-term. Second, there are those epiphanies that represent eruptions, or reactions, to events that have been going on for a long period of time. Third are those events that are minor yet symbolically representative of major problematic moments in a relationship. Fourth, and finally, are those episodes whose effects are immediate, but their meanings are only given later, in retrospection, and in the reliving of the event. I give the following names to these four structures of problematic experience: (1) the major epiphany, (2) the cumulative epiphany, (3) the illuminative, minor epiphany, and (4) the relived epiphany. (Of course, any epiphany can be relived and given new retrospective meaning). These four types may, of course, build

[64] Used to separate data in Nvivo

> upon another. A given event may, at different phases in a person's or relationship's life, be first, major, then minor, and then later relived. A cumulative epiphany will, of course, erupt into a major event in a person's life." Denzin (1989: 129).

These epiphanies became prominent features within interviews and during the analysis. An example was displayed by one of the participants, Rochelle, who lost her mother in primary school which meant she had to move schools (major epiphany); she then moved between living with her grandparents and father during her secondary schooling and college experiences due to her mother's death (cumulative epiphany); the secondary school she attended is on the outskirts of a major city and is predominantly white and she then begins to notice how she is viewed/treated as a young Black girl (illuminative epiphany); it is within our interview that she is able to express and understand her educational experiences and the key moments as relayed to me (relived epiphany).

Section Three

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an important aspect of the research process and was significant within this study. Galletta and Cross (2012: 12) explain that reflexivity "is the process of examining your influence on the construction of the research design in carrying out research activities." This is elaborated further by Fox and Allan (2013: 2) who explain why this is necessary as, "when we research and when we write, our selves are inextricably involved and our interpretation of what takes place is informed by our points of view," as well as our lived experiences. Reflexivity is also strongly advocated

by Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Maton, 2003; Kenway and McLeod, 2004). For these reasons, I began this thesis with an autoethnography of my own educational experiences and journey, and how my identity shaped these. It is hoped that this assisted in situating and providing context, as well as justification for the present research study. Additionally, as I share the same racialised, gendered and graduate identity, as well as similar ethnicity and cultural backgrounds with the participants, being reflexive was especially pertinent[65]. Being reflexive demands that I consider any possible biases or over-relating in the research process due to my shared identity with the participants. In this study, reflexivity was facilitated in two ways, firstly through the maintenance of a research journal and secondly by being mindful about my positionality as a Black British woman graduate and the advantages and disadvantages this entailed. I discuss this in more detail within this section.

Research journal

An article by Annink (2017: 3- 4) which illustrates the purposes of research journals found that they contain "critical analysis of the (political) context in which actions unfold, the researchers' knowledge, skills, expertise, values, assumptions, and the emotions evoked by the research." In this way, it can act as a tool to capture significant but often overlooked parts of the research process which can enhance how for instance, further interviews are conducted and how the data is interpreted. It provides a perfect way to be reflexive through recording the process as it happens which enables "reflection-in-action" (Boutilier and Mason, 2012: 200). When keeping

[65] This also meant that I encountered some psycho, social and emotional challenges when completing this research. Please see appendix 9 (page 353) for my reflections on this

my own research journal, by doing so online, it became a “digital journal” (Annink, 2017: 5) and I wrote about my feelings and thoughts frequently. I also carried a notebook which I brought to all of my interviews so as not to forget anything which I would then add to the online document at the end of each day. A typical layout for an entry into my journal comprised of a title for example: Interview 1, the date, information about the setting, the time we met and how long the interview lasted, information about participants’ body language or how they answered certain questions, amongst other observations. I started my research journal before I began my fieldwork up until after I had finished analysing the data. As well as assisting with reflexivity, the research journal can help to enhance the quality of the research by “contributing to the trustworthiness of a research study,” (Jasper, 2005: 248) as it shows each step of the research process. In addition, “the data presented in a research journal can be used as another form of data and to supplement primary sources of data,” (Lamb, 2013: 34).

However, there are also criticisms to take into account when keeping a research journal and using them within research. Two such criticisms are shared by Alaszewski (2006: 114) when he writes about research diaries[66]. These include the “selection bias” in what is written in entries and how the keeping of a diary is “a demanding and skilled activity,” which needs to be consistent to achieve the desired results, especially within research. Another criticism levelled against research journals is that it “lacks objectivity and there is a danger of overindulgence of the ‘self’ in embellishing what is recorded,” (Lamb, 2013: 33). Being reflexive about how you write the research journal can counter this.

[66] Another name for research journals

Positionality

As a third-generation, Black British woman graduate myself, this had both advantages and disadvantages when conducting this research. According to Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorket (2008: 553) positionality is "the ways in which *others* position the individual and affiliations [the researcher] may have," [emphasis in original]. It is also about being aware of how I position myself and as Galletta and Cross (2012: 12) highlight, "with considerable reflexivity, your autobiography and its relationship to the topic have the potential to contribute greatly to the research." Based on my own educational experiences, journeys and identity, it meant that I often occupied simultaneous positions as an insider and an outsider. An insider in that I had a shared identity as a fellow Black British woman who was also a graduate; and an outsider as I did not have the same educational experiences and journeys as the participants and I was occupying the role of a researcher, exploring into their lives. This signified the ambitious task of having to "juggle, adjust and readjust to the different positionalities imputed to me," (Kennedy-Macfoy, 2013: 492). Furthermore, in many cases researchers investigate phenomena that they are removed from but, I was inextricably linked to the topic under study and the participants by way of shared identities. As the topic explores a marginalised group (which I am a part of), the limited educational research dedicated to Black British women warrants the desire I felt to contribute in a way to fill this void. Therefore, in a similar way that is identified by Asher (2001: 2), I did not "have the option of visiting marginality solely as a researcher. I live there." My identity as a third-generation Black British woman first and foremost is, as I previously state, central to who I am and shapes my lived experiences. Being a graduate means that I have an insight into what it feels like to go through the English

education system. However, my own journey and understandings cannot be used as the standard for the multiple educational experiences and journeys which other Black women graduates have encountered. In this way then, by considering my own positionality, as Cole and Knowles (2001: 30) stipulate I was engaging in "issues of (inter)subjectivity and the importance of acknowledging one's stance or position as researcher…[which] leads to heightened awareness of self, other, and the self-other dialectic."[67]

Advantages of my identity as a third-generation Black British woman researcher include being seen as 'one of them' and this is expressed when participants share that they believe that it is easier to talk with me and share particular instances of say, hair issues[68] along their educational journeys. Similar instances are recalled by Maylor (2009a: 60) when she says how "sometimes respondents who share a Caribbean heritage will begin to converse in Patois or use certain words and phrases, knowing that I am able to comprehend what they are saying and the meanings they are trying to convey." Within this study, participants, at times altered between different accents, slang as well as Patois and in particular Yoruba phrases to emphasise certain parts of their stories[69]. I noticed that this occurred once they had enquired and established the additional parts of my Black British woman identity such as being from the South East and having a dual Caribbean and African heritage. However, this meant that I often had to get participants to elaborate, translate or unpick what they had shared for the purposes of clarity and to counter any assumptions that I may hold about what they really meant. Sometimes, this action did cause confusion as they didn't understand why I probed further so I often had to explain that it was "for the purpose of the audio-

[67] See appendix 9 (page 353) for my reflections on the psycho, social and emotional challenges I encountered over the course of this study
[68] which is quite a prominent feature of Black womanhood
[69] As mentioned previously, these are examples of code-switching (Boulton, 2016; Lewis, 2018)

recorder." Another advantage was the power dynamics which were more equal between the participants and me. I attribute this to firstly the rapport that was developed through the communication beforehand and the flexible nature of qualitative research and semi-structured interviewing where participants were able to share as much or as little as they wanted. Secondly, my identity as a Black woman graduate meant that I was either not much older than they were, the same age or younger. As well as this, as I said before, being viewed as 'one of them' helped the researcher/participant relationship. But boundaries were definitely in place both for ethical reasons and because I was engaging with the participants for a purpose. In order to maintain a level of professionalism I would arrive early and set up my equipment[70] for the interviews beforehand, making sure I stayed within the time limits we had agreed for the interviews and communicated with participants in a formal manner in any correspondence we had. Although this was not the case for me, Maylor (2009a:60) acknowledges that "commonality of racial and ethnic identities and experiences does not always result in potential Black respondents being any more willing to engage with you or the research process, or see you having any greater understanding and therefore being worthy of sharing their experiences." I am privy to the fact that there can sometimes be an assumption that as a Black woman, it will be easier to research and interview other Black women, but it is often a case of personalities and rapport between the researcher and participant. Lastly, the disclosure from Rollock (2013: 505) that during her research on Black middle-class parents she felt that she "became the conduit for delivering the message- our message- accurately to the masses," and how it "was both a privilege and simultaneous weight on my consciousness," resonates to my own experiences when

[70] information sheet, consent form, audio-recorder, notebook and pens.

conducting this research. Many participants were very excited to have a chance to speak about educational experiences and journeys that they thought nobody cared about. For example, at the end of her interview La'Shay pointed out:

"I would just say that what you are doing is amazing and I think more people need to talk about it cos you can feel like you are the only person that this happened to and it's not true."

This was also echoed by Shakirah who said:

"As soon as I saw the poster that you put up, I said "Yeah this is me, I need to tell her about my experience, I need to do this cos this is important." And I straightaway looked at it and I thought "Yes!" cos my education- the education system that I have been through has been a very difficult one for me."

However, this did add pressure as I wanted to meet their expectations and to share the stories that they told in an emancipatory way to evoke some kind of positive change. However, I also tried to remain as neutral as possible and be guided by my theoretical frameworks when interpreting, analysing and presenting the data. Although it is argued that being neutral is impossible within research as for instance "writing is never neutral or innocent because it is a social and a political activity with consequences and that, as such, writing about, and thereby re-presenting, lives carries a heavy ethical burden," (Sikes, 2010: 11; Rathburn and Turner, 2012). In order to acknowledge authority over the storyline which the participants should have, I often reassured participants that everything they shared was valid because it meant something to them as they had felt that it was relevant to share in the interviews. To acknowledge the authority in the text, as mentioned previously, I didn't change how they self-identified within the participant table and encouraged them to write their own

brief biographies to represent themselves and their educational experiences and journeys. When writing up my findings, this was integral, and I often referred to these to heighten my reflexivity throughout the research and to remind myself about the voices I was amplifying.

Being reflexive is a complex yet useful and needed component of all research. When focusing on research positionality, “the rigour of self-reflexivity can only strengthen the endeavour [and] make it more meaningful,” (Asher, 2001: 11). It is even more important within qualitative research as it “strengthens the rigour of the design by attending to your thought processes, assumptions, decision making and actions taken in order to locate and explore ethical and methodological dilemmas,’ (Galletta and Cross, 2012: 12). I am able to assess and understand what my identity as a Black British woman graduate means, which is central to who I am, as well as the type of research that I conduct. I see my role as a Black woman researcher as significant and privileged when conducting research that includes the educational experiences and journeys of a group that have previously been overlooked in the British research community. This is echoed by Maylor (2009a: 62) when she writes, “we [Black women researchers] are in a powerful position in that we are able to research diverse communities, analyse/interpret, report their words and make recommendations to for example, further inform practice and/or student experience.”

Ethical considerations

Due to the exploratory nature of qualitative research and the involvement of additional people, ethics were a significant consideration within this study and ethical

approval was successfully granted[71]. The guidelines laid out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA)(2011)[72], the University of Birmingham (2017) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)(2017a) were followed carefully. Although the ethical guidelines varied slightly between each organisation, the main principles of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, limiting harm to participants and informing participants of their right to withdraw were consistent.

An outline of the research was given in the poster; then when people got in touch via email, I provided more details. All participants were presented with information sheets[73] and consent forms[74] before the start of the interviews. Participants were then given hard copies of both the information sheet and a signed copy of the consent form. In order to uphold confidentiality, pseudonyms were employed in place of names, places and any other identifying information. When upholding anonymity, this proved to be somewhat of a challenge as it meant that I had to alter parts of the in-depth accounts that participants shared in their interviews. This potentially risked changing the message being conveyed and happened within Brown's (1991) life history study *Mama Lola* where she too, admits that she had to slightly change and at times, fabricate participant accounts to retain anonymity. Using a similar line of action to Brown, only slight changes were made to participant stories in efforts to retain anonymity when it could be compromised, but every effort was made to keep its authenticity.

The in-depth nature of the semi-structured interview along with the focus on the educational journeys and experiences that the Black British women graduates encountered meant that there were times when participants expressed a range of

[71] See appendix 5 (page 347)
[72] These guidelines were updated in 2018
[73] See appendix 6 (page 348)
[74] See appendix 7 (page 350)

emotional responses. Mindful of ethical considerations and their well-being, I asked participants who became emotional if they wished to stop the interview. In addition, on the information sheet, participants were warned that they may experience different emotions and were provided with contact details to access additional support[75] after the interviews. Lastly, participants were informed at the start and end of every interview of their right to withdraw up to three months after the interview and if they did their accounts would not be included in the final thesis. This was also detailed on the hardcopies they were able to keep.

Once interviews were carried out and transcribed, transcripts were saved in a secure and password protected hard drive in compliance with the General Data Protection (GDP) Regulation (2018). In line with the University of Birmingham's regulations, all of the data for this study was organised and uploaded onto their BEAR Archive (2018) system, which is an internal and secure database, where access is only provided with prior permission. As well as this, due to the ESRC studentship requirements, I supplied the outcomes and data from my research to Researchfish[76]. Participants were also emailed a summary of the main findings from the research once the final draft of the thesis was completed and invitations were extended to them when I presented this study at accessible events.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the underpinnings that have directed the course of this research. Thomas (2013: 103) notes that "a successful research project depends

[75] These support systems included: Support Line, the Samaritans and SANE
[76] Researchfish is "the research reporting system for the research councils" (ESRC 2017b)

upon the integration of all these elements (purpose, questions, approach and methods)," and it is hoped that this methodology chapter has clearly evidenced this. I began the chapter by introducing in the first section the ontological and epistemological stances which work well with and were influenced by the research questions. In section 2, I focused on how I selected the participants by explaining how I recruited them, why they were chosen and who they are. I proceeded to illustrate the decision to use qualitative methods and semi-structured interviews in particular. I then showed how I completed the process of both collecting and analysing the data from the semi-structured interviews. In the final section, I was reflexive about the entire research process and showed how I made my ethical considerations. The next chapter will present the findings that emerged from these processes.

CHAPTER 5: “WE ARE NOT A MONOLITH”- EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES OF BLACK BRITISH WOMEN IDENTITIES THROUGH THE SHIFTS IN CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDINGS AND CATEGORIES

Introduction

Closely connected to chapter 2 where I conceptually situated the Black British women graduates within wider understandings of their identities, this findings chapter will explore and discuss how the participants express their identities within educational contexts. These narratives will be structured in terms of what it means to be Black, British and women considering the role of whiteness, ethnicity and cultural diversity within the ‘Black’ category; alongside both class and gender distinctions. Firstly, this chapter explores the role of whiteness to frame how these understandings translate within participants’ educations. Secondly, it highlights the diversity within the ‘Black’ category and the importance in considering these distinctions in relation to educational experiences and journeys. Thirdly, the mechanisms of social class are considered to build upon previous literature that focuses mainly on working-class Blackness. Lastly, gender will be examined to locate the Black British women in relation to white girls/women and Black boys/men within the education system.

Black identities in relation to whiteness

Participants were critical and showed awareness of the influence and role of whiteness within society as a whole but also in their educational journeys and experiences. It became apparent that whiteness was for them an ‘othering’ device and

a constant reminder of their own raced identities which were framed in opposition. For example, the following extract from Kemi illustrates this when she makes sense of her Black British identity:

"It's like being British and being in a country where a majority of the people are white, you try and become someone who you are not amongst your journey, along the way, somewhere. It's weird, we have all wanted to change our name, I wanted to be Kara instead of Kemi. I know Black boys who have wanted to change their names, my brother went through it. And I feel like that is a consequence of being Black and British. You are amongst white people a lot and they look at you and ask you how you say your name, or they pronounce it wrong and you accept it. It's things like that, so the journey throughout life and especially education is very much confusing, and being a girl on top of that like you don't really know who you are, what you are, what you are meant to become, what route you're meant to take in life, and it's very confusing for a Black British female to be in the education system." **(Kemi, 24, Nigerian-British)**

The previous account from Kemi is not unusual as Bhopal (2018: 22) reinforces that "many white people take their identity for granted in ways that no non-white or black person is able to do. Black people are constantly aware of their identity, particularly in relation to how they are positioned compared with whites." In CRT terms, Kemi's counter-story centres her experience which would usually remain untold, therefore it acts as "a tool for exposing, analysing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege," (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002: 32). Kemi demonstrates her experience of whiteness by grappling with who she is, based on her awareness of being a young Black woman in a predominantly white, society and specifically how this translates into her educational experiences. Mirza (1997: 3) substantiates Kemi's uncertainty when she notes that:

> "In a time when your 'belonging', who you *really* are, is judged by the colour of your skin, the shape of your nose, the texture of your hair, the curve of your body- your perceived genetic and physical presence; to be black (not white), female and 'over here' in Scotland, England or Wales, is to disrupt all the safe closed categories of what it means to be British: that is to be white and British," [emphasis in original].

Kemi asserts how her name becomes a signifier of difference because it unmistakably originates and has meaning from elsewhere[77] and thus is what she (and her brother) try to alter as a way to gain acceptance[78]. In their paper[79] Carneiro et al (2016) illustrate how it was common for immigrants to America to adopt 'American' names[80] within the first year of arrival because it was believed to help the assimilation process like gaining jobs and US citizenship. While Kemi is not an immigrant who has just arrived in England, her experiences emphasise the power that names can yield. This also has real consequences beyond the education system within the labour market as a test by the BBC (2017) reveals that 'white sounding' names result in more job interviews than 'foreign' sounding ones. In this way, in Bourdieusian terms, names become 'racialised facilitative capital' (Rampersad, 2014), that is, they hinder or assist in accessing job opportunities in the case of the BBC study, distinguishing who belongs in particular spaces. Kemi[81] also expresses a sense of frustration when she refers to her experiences of constantly being asked by her white peers about how to pronounce her name and how when it is mispronounced, she simply has to accept it. This also highlights the relative sense of powerlessness, in part due to her stated minority status that may stop Kemi from constantly challenging the mispronunciation

[77] Specifically the Yoruba tribe from Nigeria in her case
[78] Although it is unclear whether changing names will be sufficient to gain the desired acceptance
[79] Aptly titled; *Please Call Me John: Name Choice and the Assimilation of Immigrants in the United States, 1900-1930,*
[80] in other words white-sounding names
[81] even though she was born and raised in England

of her name. These incidences can be characterised as racial microaggressions which are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward people of colour,” (Sue et al, 2007: 271). In fact, within US educational contexts, Kohli and Solózano (2012) liken the mispronunciation of students of colour’s names as ‘cultural disrespect’ and a manifestation of deeper factors originating from racism and racial microaggressions that have lasting impact on students of colour. For example, they explain that “a teacher’s mispronunciation of a name may seem so insignificant. However, when analyzed through historical racism, the cumulative effect of mis-saying a name intended to instil dignity can diminish its power,” (Kohli and Solózano, 2012: 457). In the next two-part excerpt, a similar sentiment is expressed by Jumoke regarding contestation with her Black identity in relation to whiteness:

“I would say that for me, even in university as well, I would say my whole education, I have struggled with what it means to be Black. In a sense that growing up around a lot of white people, there were a lot of things that growing up with them did. I felt like I was a part of that culture in a sense, but then there were a lot of things that like, for example my mum would just not let me do. So, it was like what is it? And I did get teased as well in secondary school like y’know “You sound so white”, “You’re a coconut”. They’d make fun of my name…This is white people saying it to me, I would be called a “coconut”, an “oreo”, they would make fun of my name, so my name is {states full name} and they would make rhymes to make fun of it, and when you are a kid, that stuff is so deep, it’s like the worst thing that anybody can say to you.” **(Jumoke, 23, Black British of Nigerian heritage)**

It is understandable why being ‘different’ from the majority can create a sense of confusion about one’s place and identity- especially when “whiteness often goes

unmarked…[and] assumes to speak with universal authority and truth," (Yancy, 2000: 156). For Jumoke, who attended predominantly white educational institutions, on the one hand, she feels part of the (white) culture due to being born into it and consistently being within it due to her educational experiences. On the other hand, she is made aware of her 'difference' through the structures imposed on her by her mother, as part of her upbringing which she deems to be stricter than her white peers, how she talks which is deemed to be "so white" resulting in being given the label "coconut" or "Oreo"[82] and of course, by her non-Westernised name. Apart from her name which can be seen as a form of capital, the other features she calls out such as the way she speaks can be seen as her habitus which is present "at all times and in all places, in the forms of her dispositions which are so many marks of social position," (Bourdieu, 1990:82). Moreover, although she 'sounds' and 'speaks' like those from the dominant culture, she recalls that she is still called out by her white peers as being inauthentic, possibly based upon negative notions surrounding how Black people should be, speak and sound (Rollock, 2014; Schwarz, 2016). As Chen (2017: 16) points out, "white and black identities are constructed simultaneously, the characteristics and qualities of people with white skin are reinforced as positive, which is in direct response to European travellers' negative portrayal of people with dark skin." She also shares briefly at the end, the psychological consequences of racism (Rollock, 2016) which she experiences by being constantly questioned, 'othered' and ridiculed from a young age throughout her educational journey.

Jumoke continues her counter-story reflecting on the perceived 'authenticity' of her Black identity in the second part of the excerpt from her interview:

[82] Offensive term to denigrate Black people who are perceived to be "acting white" by likening them to the fruit coconut or a type of biscuit- Oreo, which is black/brown on the outside but white on the inside.

"It really made me question "Am I Black enough?" Like my hair is the way Black people's are, but I don't talk like what a typical Black person would talk like. In a way I don't know, I talked like a 'white' person. Even to the point where, when I was in secondary school, I changed my name, so the name I am currently using isn't my first name, my first name is {says first name} and in primary school they just ripped my name to shreds, like they could never pronounce it. Teachers, students, nobody could say it right, so when I got to secondary school I was like "I am gonna change my name, everybody's gonna call me something simpler!" And now that I am a bit older and I understand what the meaning behind my name is, I do feel a little bit sad that I felt like I had to change it. So, the name I currently use is my middle name and that's why I changed it so I could shorten it to sound more westernised and more 'white'. But yeah, I would definitely tell my younger self to not worry about being what other people think you should be, like you're enough, you're Black, you're African! And loving that culture took a while but I got there in the end." **(Jumoke, 23, Black British of Nigerian heritage)**

Once Jumoke is sidelined from and by whiteness, she suggests that she begins to interrogate where she *really* belongs. Through the lens of CRT, Jumoke's search for belonging occurs because, "the education system is understood as shaped by white supremacy, which defines roles, identities, interaction and policy [and often] minority ethnic identities are defined as 'other' against a white norm," (Chadderton, 2013: 44). When Jumoke divulges how she embarks upon the daunting process of questioning her own Blackness, this happens as she believes, due to her presence in predominantly white spaces, she will be positioned in a contrasting way to "a typical Black person." For this reason, she is uncertain about whether she will be accepted as authentic by her own group and she tries to fixate on her physical appearance as a way to reassure herself that she is 'one of them', citing such attributes like her hair. However, because of the way she sounds and speaks, which has previously

charaterised her as “so white”[83], she remains uncertain. As mentioned previously, such characteristics like speech, style and interactions can be described as one’s habitus as well as capitals and often differ according to who they are deployed by and where it is accepted as legitimate (Yosso, 2005). Jumoke’s awareness of speech differences point to ‘non-dominant cultural capital’ which “describes those resources used by lower status individuals to gain “authentic” cultural status positions within their respective communities,” (Carter, 2003: 138). It is her lack of sounding and speaking “Black” which she feels makes her an inauthentic Black person. Moreover, the results of such internal interrogation are drastic in the case of Jumoke who, unlike Kemi, *does* change her name to gain acceptance from her white peers in her surroundings. In many ways, Jumoke’s two-part extract exhibits Cross’ (1971) racial identity development frame which includes five stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, internalisation and internalisation-commitment. As Jumoke has been part of the dominant culture and brought into notions that for instance, talking properly is “so white” and thus not normal for “a typical Black person”[84] (pre-encounter), she then experiences being taunted about her speech by her white peers which is deemed to be in opposition to her Black identity in which she acknowledges the profound effect this has on her (encounter), she then focuses on her Blackness, trying to align herself within it due to her rejection from whiteness (immersion). After which, she confesses to being sad about changing her name to conform to whiteness and how she becomes more secure in who she is (internalisation). Lastly, from her newfound position of acceptance and reflection, she asserts the importance in loving her African culture (internalisation-commitment). However, it must be noted here that not all Black British students encounter such experiences with their names- an attribute to differing

[83] in part-one of her excerpt
[84] whatever that is/means!

cultures and histories which influence the names given. Deja expresses this well in the next passage:

"Names are unique to every individual and that can shape how people react to you and also how you act in society as well. You'll see from a register, you can pretty much guess if someone is Black African because of their name, their names are very traditional or cultured- they're so different to Western names. However, with [some] Black Caribbeans, you are not always sure if they are Black or white or even if they are Asian or something, therefore the differences can start from that base level. Your name and what you're called. When you think of UK Black people and then American Black people and how their names are different and how it- so you're always coming with - or people always see your exterior first, your culture first, see you by your name or how you look." **(Deja, 23, Black British Caribbean)**

Of course, Deja is speaking generally, but she illustrates the differences in the types of names that Black Africans, Black Caribbeans and African-American people tend to have compared to western sounding names and therefore how these differences have deeper implications for certain groups in places like educational institutions as exemplified by Kohli and Solózano (2012) previously. According to Crockett (2017), in his article about 'Black-sounding' American names, he asserts the need to maintain the creativity of such names with different spellings and "an influx of hyphens and apostrophes in all their glory." He argues that ultimately it shouldn't be such a big deal because "at some point you have to ask that the world embrace you exactly where you are, and if your name is…then, damn it, be… in all its glory. Don't shorten it. Rather, force Starbucks baristas to spell it properly; work with them on the correct pronunciation. Demand that they include all of the apostrophes and hyphens that your parents placed on your birth certificate, because you deserve a place in this world, and we need to open ourselves up to that."

Overall, Kemi, Jumoke and Deja's accounts illustrate the long-lasting effects that trying to find one's place can have on individuals as well as the insidious nature of whiteness within these experiences, particularly based on one's name which can be seen to exacerbate their educational experiences. Whiteness presents itself as another significant theme within the next chapter which will look at how it operates within different educational institutions. Beyond names, ethnicity and cultural differences highlight that there is diversity within a group that has come to be broadly identified as 'Black'. In a powerful and thought-provoking statement, I end this section by quoting Toni Morrison (1975) who perfectly summarises the kinds of work the participants have to do to validate their places within whiteness as demonstrated:

> "The function, the very serious function of racism, is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language, so you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly, so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Someone says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of that is necessary. There will always be one more thing."

Diversity within Blackness

Within this study, attention is given to the intersectionality of gender, social class, race and ethnicity/cultural background to expand and explore the roles they play within the education of the 25 Black British women graduates. The ethnicity and cultural background considerations were also common themes within interviews. Below, Ebony tries to make sense of the reasons why she feels like Black British

Caribbean students have different educational experiences and journeys to Black British African students:

"First off the boat always gets it the hardest, so the Caribbean people that came to the UK faced a lot of systematic oppression that we paved the way for Africans who are the newest wave of Black immigrants to come in. I do think that is…it's hard to compare apples and oranges, do you get what I mean? Because even though we are Black, we are not a monolith, so it's like I do understand we came off the boat and it was harder and stuff like that and like it's been made slightly easier." **(Ebony, 25, British with Jamaican and Guyanese heritage)**

Ebony's account where she believes that Black British Caribbean students have had a harder time in the education system points to the well documented educational experiences and journeys of the hostility and institutional racism that Black Caribbean children encountered in the 1950s and beyond. For example, Coard (1971) exposed the unfair and disproportionate rates in which Black Caribbean children were being labelled 'educationally subnormal' and shipped to special schools away from the mainstream. In addition, due to the consistent underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils, the British government commissioned the Rampton report (1981) to investigate and improve this. Findings included low teacher expectations and a lack of teachers from diverse backgrounds as some of the contributing factors. However, as Valdez and Golash-Boza (2017: 257) put forward, race and ethnicity play differing roles in the relationships of groups and the importance of "illuminating how ethnic-based relationships with race-based ones require a consideration of the racialised social structure". This need for the 'consideration of the racialised social structure' is a reason why CRT is crucial. As Chadderton (2013: 44) highlights, "CRT in education provides an important contribution to the debate around how wider social inequalities are

produced and reproduced by the school system, focusing specifically on racial inequalities," and through the inclusion of ethnicity and cultural background identities, it can show the varied or similar ways that different ethnic groups within the same racialised groups navigate and engage within the education system.

When Ebony talks about 'paving the way', this can be interpreted as the response from the Caribbean community to such educational injustices encountered by their children where "historically, in the UK urban black communities have been critical sites for black-Caribbean individuals forging politics of struggle and resistance," (Wright, 2013: 96). Such 'struggle and resistance' is exemplified with the establishment of Black supplementary schools from the 1950s (Mirza and Reay, 2000; Andrews, 2013; 2016) and the fight for the creation of policies by Black Caribbean communities (along with others) to address inequalities in the education system and wider British society (The Race Relations Act, 1965; 1968; 1976; the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000). In this way, Ebony situates this notion of the education system being "made slightly easier" for other Black British groups. Little research has connected or assessed the effects of the educational legacy of the first generation of Caribbeans in the education system to present generations (Vincent et al, 2013; James, 2019; Shand-Baptiste, 2020). In some ways then, the experiential knowledge of the participants can illustrate some of these. Janaya offers her experiences about the differences she observed amongst Black groups throughout her educational journey:

"*See I was talking to my friend about this the other day and she was like…we segregated badly, at one point you think everything is cool, all talking to each other, but you see Asians here, you see Chinese there, you see Blacks here and the subcategories of Black. You had your Africans there, you had Jamaicans here…it was*

just…I don't know, the culture is different and I feel like we are all Black, but we have to acknowledge that…like it's a different upbringing, it's a different way of life and that was definitely evident when we were in college- 100%." **(Janaya, 22, Caribbean)**

The self-segregation into similar ethnicity and cultural groupings within educational contexts that Janaya alludes to in her interview is a phenomenon that is not new and is an occurrence that happens between students of similar social class, gender as well as racial groups. In the US, a study shared the experiences of Black and Hispanic students similarly sticking to their own racial and ethnic groupings in an university setting, which Lewis (2012: 273) noted occurs because "people are socialised into the subculture of their specific positions; just as speaking in a foreign language requires extra energy and effort, interaction across social distance requires extra energy as the code of expectations and actions of each social position are unique." More specifically to Black students, Carter (2007) showed how they stuck together and made their own spaces to create identity-affirming, counter spaces in a predominantly white high school. In essence, it was both a coping and survival strategy for them.

Simone shares a similar experience to Janaya about socialising predominantly with Black girls like herself in school. For her, the act of identifying as Caribbean emerged when she became a minority and wished to root herself somewhere. However, this sense of pride in her cultural background changes when she goes to university. This can be read that although she was a minority in school, she had other Caribbean girls which affirmed her pride whereas, at university, she was on her own and had no-one to identify with. This is interesting considering there were other Black students there:

"That was just the thing that we all- or most of us had to go through before we got to that stage of "stop trying to separate." So that was one thing I noticed in high school because as I said, when I went to the first primary school, I was with a group of Black girls- we didn't really care but once we got to high school, I wanted to…I guess it's the fact that I was no longer a majority so it wasn't just like "oh who cares?" I had to define myself at that point and I was like "No I am Caribbean!" But, as I got to uni, I felt more embarrassed about being Caribbean if anything…Because I had understood what that meant, like most of the Black people at uni were African do you know what I mean? And to be Caribbean is just like, I don't know, it's just…there's a massive stigma." **(Simone, 21, Caribbean British)**

By talking about the 'massive stigma' around being Caribbean in university, Simone highlights the intra-group stereotypes created amongst Black people in terms of educational aspirations. This belief in differing cultures and upbringings in terms of educational aspirations between British African and British Caribbean households were also shared by other participants like Makeda who is from a Caribbean background along with Claudia who has an African heritage:

"Thinking back, I think the difference between the Black British Caribbean and the Black British African is that I feel like the Caribbeans are a little bit…they are more relaxed on education rather than, from what I can remember, my African friends. Their parents really really valued education and it was quite y'know, "You need to do well!" Of course, Caribbean parents do too, but it was definitely much more relaxed… cos my mum is actually quite relaxed. She is just like you know "You'll be fine just once you have a job." It's kinda more like the job thing…I feel like it's settling- "Do what you gotta do." Whereas the Africans, it's like "You must have good grades, you must get to the top, you must be the best!" But I feel like Caribbeans no, I actually feel like it's kinda a bit more…So my friends who are Caribbean, the Grenadian ones, their parents are very chilled, very very chilled like "You don't do well, it's ok!" Like it's fine y'know {laughs} "You'll do better next time." I feel like in comparison to my African friends' mums or dads or whatever, it's like a little bit more…they are a bit more nervous if

things don't go well in terms of their grades or they might have to hide their grades from them or not tell the truth. I don't know if I am generalising but that's just from what I have noticed." **(Makeda, 24, Black Caribbean)**

Interestingly, Claudia distinguishes between Ghanaian parents and households compared to Nigerian ones which once again illustrates the diversity within Black groups along with other factors:

"I think Ghanaian parents are a little- literally a little bit more relaxed more than let's say my Nigerian friends whose parents would be on them. My parents did give me a bit more freedom, I do think in all fairness, that's me just being the youngest, my sister did not get the freedom that I did but I think they realised that they needed to give it to me." **(Claudia, 24, British Ghanaian)**

Examined through the lens of CRT, the experiential knowledge of Ebony, Janaya, Simone, Makeda and Claudia are key as they provide insightful definitions of Blackness and the many differences within it such as ethnicity, cultural background and upbringing (Solorzano, 1997). These categories also influence their own educational aspirations, experiences and journeys. Moreover, the intersection of gender and race are well-known features within the area of intersectionality however, the added nuance of ethnicity and cultural background enables a more detailed and inclusive study of racial groups.

Through a CRT lens, Ebony, Janaya, Simone, Makeda and Claudia demonstrate with their experiential knowledge, the ways in which Black ethnicities and cultural identities operate within their educational journeys. As Murray-Johnson (2013: 55) stipulates, "there are significant differences in the way that African and Caribbean immigrants in the United States perceive themselves, each other, and their racial identities within a traditionally racialised U.S. context." Such differences are also

present within English contexts. Ebony references the hostile history of the English education system that mainly impacted upon Black British Caribbean students whose most recent post-WWII migration in large numbers made them one of the first Black groups to enter the education system. Ebony feels that this may be a reason for current differences in the experiences of different Black British ethnic groups who she stresses are “not a monolith”. Janaya’s reflections of the self-segregation that occurs amongst students of the same racialised, ethnicity and cultural groups during her time at college is fascinating when she emphasises the differences between different Black ethnic groups because this has rarely been observed within previous literature. Simone’s account shows how ethnicity and cultural identities were most prominent within her secondary school journey where she had a sense of pride in asserting her Caribbean heritage and then during university where it becomes negative due to what she defines as a “stigma” due to the lack of students from similar ethnic backgrounds to her. Differences in upbringing highlighted first by Janaya and supported by Makeda and Claudia provide insight about educational aspirations, experiences and journeys that originate in the home. Lastly, Berry and Candis (2013: 61) write that “while we must acknowledge the ever-present normalness of race and racism, we must also resist the singular ways we are defined, by ourselves and by society…[as] our cultural identities and experiences inform how we recall our stories.” The importance of experiential knowledge is that such insights are not often considered when researching the experiences of Black students within the education system. Also, in some ways then, CRT which is concerned with the impacts of racism in society is limited in this area because as argued by Dumas and Ross (2016: 417) “it cannot fully employ the counterstories of Black experiences of structural and cultural racisms, because it does not, on its own, have language to richly capture how antiblackness constructs Black

subjects, and positions them in and against law, policy, and everyday (civic) life." Yet, by employing Black feminist epistemology where Black women's self-definitions are key, this supports CRT to coherently articulate these experiences.

Another significant aspect of British Black categories is the variation in class positions and the next section will delve deeper to explore how this class variation functions for participants within this research.

Blackness and Social Class

In Britain, there is evidence to suggest that there is an emerging Black middle-class with varied lived as well as educational experiences to Black working-class groups. Some of the participants in this research share these differences based on middle-class positionings. Yet, when focusing on Black British middle-class positions, it must be noted that they are precarious in nature because they are not "accumulated over successive generations," (Bourdieu, 1990: 119). In the following, Ebony communicates her experiences of being both Black and middle-class:

"See this is…this is interesting because I've read loads of articles where the Black middle-class don't actually want to identify themselves as Black middle-class- simply because of the label and the stigma. It's just like my mum- even though she has like worked her way up- she definitely still describes herself as working class. But because of the educational exposure I have had, I am by definition middle class" **(Ebony, 25, British with Jamaican and Guyanese heritage)**

Ebony shows her relatively new location as middle-class by sharing how it is her mother who achieved social mobility and she discusses being aware of the 'labels and stigmas' attached to her social class positioning. This is explained by Rattansi

(2000: 124) who highlights how "*middleclassness* are often seen as heralding a weakening commitment to '*blackness',*" [emphasis in original]. However, Ebony's mother may not identify as middle-class because, as Bourdieu (1986) stated social class positioning can present itself as "the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body," which she may not identify with as a Black Caribbean woman who has 'worked her way up'- although this has enabled Ebony to gain access to and participate in private schooling. Interestingly, it is her education that Ebony feels makes her middle-class, but once again this illustrates the fairly new and precarious nature of her positioning. However, the significant role education plays in shaping one's social class status has been identified by Vincent et al (2012b: 351) who assert that this is because "education is…a key site offering opportunities for social mobility and reproduction." Maylor and Williams (2011) also found that Black women in middle class occupations with qualifications still experienced racism and had members of their families who were not in middle class occupations and so, embodying middle-classness became challenging. This also applies to Black middle-class refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants who are in employment that belies their embodied social class perspectives which they try to apply in education (Rollock et al, 2015). Therefore, the picture is more complex than Ebony's conceptions. In the next section of her interview, Ebony once again references the precarious nature of her social class within both Black and white spheres when she mentions that she is 'too white for the black kids and too black for the white kids' and how she feels that she constantly has to defend her middle-class identity:

"If I talk about my experience from a Black middle-class perspective, it's like I've always been that parallel of being 'too white for the Black kids and too Black for the white kids.' I hate to use that phrase, but I've always had to defend who I was, what

my class was, why my mum did this, why my mum did that. Like whenever I say my mum paid for my private schooling, it's the shock that you get…and the trouble is there is so much perceptions behind private school." **(Ebony, 25, British with Jamaican and Guyanese heritage)**

To understand this better, Schwarz (2016: 11) explains that through the "symbolic economy of authenticity," it "is especially detrimental for middle-class ethnic minorities, since while the distribution of tastes and dispositions is strongly classed, discursive constructions of authenticity are often racialised." This leaves individuals feeling confused about where they belong. Ebony finishes off her account by sharing what she believes is the erasure of Black middle-class experiences in wider discourses:

"There are loads of Black people who are out here and there is a big Black middle-class where our experiences are completely different. I don't feel like we are ever given that space to articulate what our educational experiences are. Like even the other day at an event I went to, when I mentioned one of my experiences, it was laughed at and not talked about, and it's just like that's another reason that a lot of Black middle-class people don't wanna talk about their experiences. Cos if our experiences don't match up to us reppin' [representing] postcodes [neighbourhoods] and stuff like that, then is our experience dignified?" **(Ebony, 25, British with Jamaican and Guyanese heritage)**

In many ways, Ebony's last quote exemplifies what Harris and Khanna (2010) discover among Black middle-class Americans in that, due to their class status they often had to "negotiate both their spatial and experiential differences from their black working and lower-class counterparts." For Ebony, this is a source of frustration which marks her as 'different' among her Black peers. The next example draws on the

positioning of Joy who makes distinctions between her experiences to that of her Black working-class peers:

"I am middle-class [because] I am from a well-to-do background and I have always been comfortable. I have never actually had to suffer- that's why I can afford to not do anything[85] *and be ok. I wasn't around many other Black students during primary school or secondary school, but I think uni was when class became a thing for me, because before it hadn't really been an issue cos I was around like [white] middle-class people, and the Black people who I was around were also middle-class. I think there was one time we were talking about stuff and people were talking about how they had to like buy school uniform a couple of sizes too big and I couldn't relate and when I said that, it was like there was definitely like a shift in- I don't know if I was seen as the enemy or I don't know. Also things like, I must've said something about having Sky TV being younger, not realising that that wasn't the norm for people, some Black people I mean sorry…So without knowing me properly, no actually no cos I think it's when they actually came to know me properly that they properly viewed me as being snobby and stuff but not initially, you wouldn't know that until you talk to me."* **(Joy, 23, British Ghanaian)**

Joy discusses her social class positioning in terms of her family's financial capital that she has always had. This affords her the advantage of not feeling pressured to find employment straight after graduating and has previously meant that small things such as buying school uniforms or having Sky TV were never issues for her. While financial capital has been deemed to be one marker of social class identity, there are many other factors which are not mentioned within her account like cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Mood, 2017). She also shares that she has always been in predominantly white middle-class spaces which distinguishes the areas that

[85] At the time of the interview, Joy was unemployed after completing her studies

she has lived in, as well as the types of schools that she has attended which is closely connected to social class. Interestingly, she only becomes aware of her social class identity and how it differs from others when she attends university. Moreover, she alludes to the fact that, initially, her Black working-class university peers see her as 'the enemy' due to the fact that she cannot relate to some of their experiences, mostly regarding money or lack thereof. These sentiments are reinforced by Rattansi (2000:124) who suggests that there is a "perceived feeling that career and economic success could only be achieved by compromising with 'white' norms, and that this would in some way imply a betrayal of the black community." This may indicate why her Black working-class peers initially viewed her in that way.

Although distinctions based on social class location are key within this analysis, the prominence of race plays an equally important role in the way that both Ebony and Joy articulate their experiences as they often discuss their Black identities within these recollections. Bourdieu's terms are useful to explain the ways that resources are employed by particular social groups to enable navigation with ease through social structures. However, within educational contexts, as Chadderton (2013: 39) points out, "despite growing evidence that racial inequalities persist, it tends to be argued that class is the main determiner of educational experience in the UK." In this sense, CRT is key when exploring the interplay of race and social class in the educational journeys and experiences of Black British women graduates as class alone cannot be viewed without considering the role of race within it. It is also evident that the narratives of both Ebony and Joy provide examples of the need to consider social class status within Black British groups and how it influences their educational experiences and journeys. The next part of this chapter will explore the role of gender in the educational experiences and journeys of Black British women graduates.

Gender identities

Through the accounts shared by many of the participants, there were additional, gendered dimensions to how whiteness operated within their educational experiences and journeys. This awareness is discussed widely within Black Feminist scholarship in which writers such as Carby (1997: 46) explain that this is because "the way the gender of black women is constructed differs from white femininity because it is also subject to racism." One of the main ways that distinctions were pronounced came through beauty standards and stereotypical behavioural traits (Steele, 1997). Throughout interviews, participants also contemplated on the divergence they believed existed between their experiences as Black women in the education system compared to Black boys/men.

White girls and women

In the following quote, Ebony shares how within her all-girls private secondary school, there were symbols that she observed ranked students by popularity and acceptance:

"I remember with girls, cos I had greased my hair to slick it back, they were like "We could fry an egg off that!" And it's just the little comments that always reiterated to me that I wasn't very much like them. So, in situations in schools like that, money talks more than anything- doesn't matter what race, creed, etc. you are- if you're rich then you're accepted, that's the first thing. Second thing is race…so race and prettiness which sorta intermix, so if you were skinny, white and blonde you ascertained [sic] to the social norms and then popularity came after that. But I was neither rich, neither skinny, white or blonde and I didn't really have the money to do the cultural activities

that they did, so a lot of the time I just felt isolated cos at first I was being invited to things but bit by bit, when they saw I couldn't reciprocate, I just stopped being invited to things." **(Ebony, 25, British with Jamaican and Guyanese heritage)**

Ebony details how her hair became a source of ridicule by her white girl peers as well as a clear reminder that she "wasn't very much like them." As Weekes (1997: 114) cites "the assumption of Whiteness as the norm indicates that Black and White women are objectified differentially [and therefore] the signifiers of hair texture, skin shade and shape of lips and noses are reacted to in terms of their approximation to Whiteness." Yet, Ebony's belief that if she were wealthy, her outsider status based upon her hair would be of little importance is substantiated by Bonnett (2000: 55) who in his book about white identities discusses how, at times, "money whitens." In this way, she is also sharing, that within specific social spaces- such as her school, the "ways of doing and being…are largely implicit and partially internalised, shaping individuals' thoughts and actions to profit from or succeed within the field according to the capitals valued by it," (Watson, 2013: 414). In this case, according to Ebony, financial capital and as she later goes on to emphasise, raced and gendered standards of white beauty are the most valued within this field- all of which she recognises that she does not possess. In many ways, she echoes the words of Collins (1990: 79) who states how:

> "externally defined standards of beauty long applied to African-American women claim[ing] that no matter how intelligent, educated, or "beautiful" a Black woman may be, those Black women whose features and skin colour are most African must "git back". Blue eyed, blond, thin white women could not be considered beautiful without the Other- Black women with classical African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair."

For Ebony, a consequence of her lack of valuable capitals by way of finance and raced and gendered beauty to her white peers are her experiences of isolation. This experience among young Black women has also been discovered by Thomas et al (2011: 536) who state that "for many of the girls, experiences of being in the minority in school raised awareness of the salience of gendered race…they faced expectations from teachers and fellow students, from physical differences, and the experience of isolation from their peers." In more detail, Makeda illustrates the frustration she has felt in own encounters, throughout her educational journey and currently within her working life, due to the ways in which she styles her hair:

"The hair thing is another big factor in the workplace and it's like all the Black people understand especially at work. It's like "Ok…" especially when- at the moment I've got braids so we expect the same questions, y'know your hair was let's say short on Friday, on Monday it's got braids so they'll be like "Oh!" Even last week, "Oh your hair has grown!" Y'know you say the same thing, you say "Yes it has." Even in school like "Oh how did you do that?" or "How….?" or they will be looking in your scalp kinda thing or y'know very personal, I think it made me feel…now it's just like I expect it, I'm used to it. But before, I'd just be…I'd be really confused, why are you asking me these questions or why don't you understand? Or don't you read? Or don't you watch TV? Or…do you know what I mean? Cos there is so much information available, I just feel like you should know! Yes, this isn't my hair- it's extensions, but you guys have extensions too, it's just a different form." **(Makeda, 24, Black Caribbean)**

From around the year 2000 onwards, there has been a re-emergence[86] of the 'natural hair movement' where many Black women have opted to wear their hair in its natural texture and/or in traditionally Black and culturally appropriate hairstyles. Such choices are significant as according to Phelps-Ward and Laura (2016: 817) "the

[86] The last phase in which many Black people rejected Western standards of beauty and opted to wear their natural hair in the form of afros and other natural styles was in the 1960s and 1970s during the Black Panther movement which began in America (Dash, 2006; Thompson, 2009).

behaviour of wearing one's hair in its natural state is not only symbolic of an internal struggle with the dominant discourse of a Eurocentric standard of beauty, but it also symbolises an external and visible action that challenges such a deeply reified notion of beauty." Moreover, as exemplified by Makeda, she perceives the excessive interest towards the versatility of her hair and the styles she chooses to wear it in by her white peers- regardless of how harmless and unintentional they may be- as microaggressions (Sue et al, 2007). This is because they result in feelings of frustration, annoyance and humiliation. On a deeper level, the questioning of the way one wears ones hair can highlight the complex operation of power or lack thereof in how Makeda can respond. Contributing from Brazil, Rocha et al (2016: 334) proclaim that "the esteem for Eurocentric aesthetics represents a power display that directly affects black women's connection to their hair, engendering discourse and considerations on how to deal with this situation." In a similar way that both Kemi and Jumoke accept the constant mispronunciation of their names, Makeda also accepts and even begins to expect the interrogation she will receive. Moreover, the confusion she rightly shares regarding the manner in which the fascination about her hair is demonstrated is cited by Dash (2006: 34) when he notes how "the popularity of jet travel, and in many countries easy access to the Internet and the media, have brought about an unprecedented mingling of cultures, values and practices." Therefore, the ignorance displayed by her white peers is something that Makeda implies should not still exist when she notes that, "you guys [white women] have extensions too."

Another significant aspect of the gendered dimension of how whiteness functions within the participants' educational experiences were through the stereotypical behavioural traits projected onto them. Collins (1990) provides an explanation about both the use and deployment of highly racialised and gendered

stereotypes which she aligns closely to the operation of power by the white elites. Within her book, Collins (2000) outlines what she terms as the objectification of Black women as the 'other' through the creation of 5[87], sometimes overlapping, controlling images[88]. Although there are variations to how these stereotypical images are understood and represented, as well as them originating in US contexts (hooks, 1981; Reynolds, 1997; Yarbrough and Bennett, 2000; Thomas et al, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ashley, 2014; Corbin et al, 2018); they are applicable in the UK and produce the same result, that is, "to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life…as the "Others" of society who can never really belong, strangers [that] threaten the moral and social order," (Collins, 1990: 68). In relation to such stereotyping that come to define Black womanhood as well as how they are perpetrated, Yancy (2000: 157) identifies that "whiteness creates a binary relationship of self-Other, subject-object, dominator-dominated, center-margin, universal-particular etc. Whiteness arranges these binary terms hierarchically, where the former term is normatively superior to the latter." Halima calls out stereotypical images that she feels define her educational experiences and other Black girls:

"*I think as a Black female, there is other things like other factors that you are fighting against. So, say for example like the 'angry Black girl' narrative, you're fighting that in a sense that it's like you don't want to be overpowering or you don't wanna put yourself out in a different way. Whereas, I don't know how to explain it but it's just like, I feel like as Black girls, you're either the goody two shoes in a sense that you do your education, you do this, you always smile or you are the snappy kinda…or like the mean girl if that makes sense- in a sense that you don't- not necessarily that you don't smile- you just have a chilled face but like the way people interact with you is different.*

[87] These include: mammy, matriarch, welfare mother, Black lady and Jezebel
[88] See appendix 10 (page 350) for these descriptions

So I think you're either one or the other- there's kinda no in-between and I think it's from a white perspective." **(Halima, 21, Black African)**

As stated by Halima, consequences of such stereotypical labels equate to what she describes as Black girls always having to fight against them as they influence how they feel able to behave and act. This is a similar finding in a study conducted by Lane (2017: 22) where she notes how Black girl students in "institutions- such as schools- serve as sites where young African American women are incessantly challenged to negotiate narrowly defined categorisations of what it means to be…" Moreover, Halima states how the stereotypes placed on Black girls impacts upon the way people interact with them alluding to teachers and peers within educational contexts. According to Youdell, (2003: 17) who explored how learner identities are constructed, she discovered that for Black British Caribbean students, "their Blackness renders them undesirable learners." No doubt, particular stereotypes will play into these beliefs and this is what Halima suggests happens to Black girls deemed to be "angry" and "overpowering". Moreover, she shows her awareness that these stereotypes come "from a white perspective" and therefore are imposed upon Black girl students who she feels can either be really bad or really good students. Reasons for this are because "Black women came to *know* themselves in terms of the destructive images created from within white imaginative spaces," (Yancy, 2000: 162) and Halima suggests that often they either reproduce them or reject them completely. Within Adeola's own educational journey, she contributes similar feelings to Halima about how she feels that herself and other Black women students are viewed:

"Black girls are seen to come across as aggressive and angry, so there are the stereotypes and labels and I don't know how those can be broken. It impacts us because people are taken aback from us and it means people won't approach us as

they would do normally because they will assume the answer- that all they will get is going to be an angry, aggressive one. And sometimes yes, you are angry and aggressive! But sometimes I think "What you just said was dumb and I am not gonna hold back and not tell you that!" Cos white people do feel exactly the same way but won't tell you to your face whereas Black people are not more confrontational, but they will tell you the truth…we have different approaches which I guess is based on how we were raised. I think that has an impact on how you conduct yourself at work and in school- from school onwards." **(Adeola, 26, Nigerian)**

Once again, Adeola mentions similar characteristics of' the "overly aggressive" Black woman stereotype in her recollections. Writing about working-class girls from various ethnic backgrounds in an inner-city school, Archer et al (2007a: 565) notes how hard it is to go against stereotypes and labels placed upon them where "the project appears 'impossible' because the girls inhabit social positionings and embodied identities that are always already read as 'wrong' in dominant educational discourses." Adeola agrees when she talks about not knowing how such stereotypical perceptions of Black girls can ever be "broken" which are continuously reproduced, reinforced and deployed by the mainstream media and internalised within educational contexts (Joseph et al, 2016, 2017). When Adeola touches upon the fact that sometimes feelings of anger and aggression are normal feelings but how they are overly related to Black women, she calls into consideration different upbringings to demarcate reasons for why she feels Black girls are more direct and will "tell you the truth" unlike their white peers. It is through family socialisation that Chavous and Cogburn (2007: 30) disclose that "black girls and boys are socialised to be aware of potential racial barriers, but girls' inculcation is accompanied by messages that instill a sense of personal pride and confidence that allows them to be academically resilient

on the face of barriers." This is the case for Adeola who is ready to speak her mind when she feels she needs and wants to.

Black boys and men

Chanel touches on stereotypes that she observed within her experiences that she believes places Black women at a slight advantage within the education system compared to Black boys:

"As a Black woman, I feel like we have a different experience to Black men, so I feel like Black men-or Black boys should I say- growing up in school, there's a stereotype and I feel like Black women have a stereotype as well, but I feel like it's not as bad as Black men in schools, and yeah I just feel like they are just failed in school- boys. But I feel like it's not on a scale…basically I am trying to say that I feel like education fails boys more than it does girls. I am not saying we are ok, but I feel like we do much better than the boys, I feel like there is more focus on Black boys than girls because I don't know…I feel like women are just more driven in education than boys are," **(Chanel, 24, Black British)**

In some ways, as Nash (2008: 12) argues, intersectional approaches can limit Black women to being the epitome of oppressed and disadvantaged in every possible way but, this does "not attend to variations within black women's experiences that afford some black women greater privilege, autonomy, and freedom". Within educational contexts, there is evidence to suggest that Black boys do experience harsher treatment that are based upon stereotypes (Phoenix and Frosh, 2001; Wright, 2010; Bryan, 2018). Moreover, Rollock (2007: 201) discovers that "dominant staff discourses about girls as academically competent serve to increase Black girls'

legitimacy in the school which their ethnicity otherwise minimises." In some ways then, the intersection of race and gender may in some cases, privilege Black girls in comparison to Black boys in the education system which is backed up by attainment statistics (Department for Education, 2017). Chanel, who has successfully navigated her way along the education system and graduated from a pre-1992 university attributes this to Black boys being failed by schools much more than girls. Like Chanel, notions of Black boys encountering more difficulty than Black girls is also suggested by Takara when she refers to the harsher treatment from teachers that she feels that Black boys come up against:

"I think for Black males, it's even more difficult in education…I think it's just even more difficult but I think we [Black girls] can kinda succeed in some way cos we continue in the education system and all throughout. But it's just a different attitude, it's just a different…Sometimes it's a bit of a slight rather than a "Get out of my class" it's just a different approach that the teacher's take to us as opposed to like…I guess you might get- Black boys probably get excluded quicker than we would get excluded and things like that, so I just think it is different." **(Takara, 23, African Caribbean)**

The recognition of Black girls having a "different attitude" speaks to research that shows that although they were aware and unhappy with the inequalities embedded in the education system, their commitment to gaining necessary qualifications meant they were 'anti-school but pro-education' (Fuller, 1980; Chigwada, 1987) and found ingenious ways to "resistance within accommodation" (Mac an Ghaill, 1988: 26). In both Chanel and Takara's narratives, they exude empathy when recounting what they believe is an overall racially unjust education system where Black girls may be slightly better at navigating due to their own agency compared to their Black male peers. The acknowledgement of this joint empathy and

struggle is central for Africana womanists as Hudson-Weems (2004: 29) maintains that Black women should view "herself as the companion to the Africana man and [work] diligently toward continuing their established union in the struggle against racial oppression."

Conversely, in the following extract, Jumoke contributes her experiential knowledge to express how she feels that Black women actually have it harder due to the overarching gender norms and expectations placed upon her:

"I don't think they [Black boys/men] have that particular manifestation of what it means to be Black and British, there are other pressures on them, don't get me wrong but…and it's like I went through exactly the same thing that 'David' went through to get a degree and to get a job and it's like all of that means nothing cos your worth is determined by marriage which is very very strange. You need these things to be valuable in a sense, but when you get to that stage and it's like "Ok well I have done everything now, I've passed my driving test, I've got my first job, I am paying bills," doing all these things but you're complaining because I am not going out and I don't have a boyfriend {laughs} So it's just a very, a very…it angers me a lot but I've had to pick and choose my battles, I've had aunties- I remember when I was doing my masters and my Aunt said to me "If you finish your Masters and you haven't got a boyfriend, I am bringing someone for you!" I was literally 21 years old, like…and even now I am 23, I've got goddamn time like there's no rush!" **(Jumoke, 23, Black British of Nigerian heritage)**

In the previous piece, Jumoke relays that although throughout the education system, Black women may be successful and achieve better than Black boys, she is frustrated that, from her own experiences, she feels that her value is determined by her family and whether she is in a relationship or married. She illustrates this by referring to the fictional Black boy character 'David' in her account. Interestingly, Walker and Barton (1983: 3) discuss how "at the level of the individual, the dominant

ideology works to regulate cultural norms of appropriate gender behaviour with respect to personal identity, social roles, work and marriage roles; these roles are *carried into the schools* by pupils and involve quite specific gender differentiation," [emphasis in orginal]. Despite Walker and Barton writing in 1983, for Jumoke, these dominant ideologies operate after her compulsory schooling and are reinforced by other Black women - her Aunties in this case. In many ways, this insight shows a major distinction between the pressures experienced by girls and boys based on gender norms and expectations. Although such expectations are not as prevalent today where women are getting married and having children much later than they did in the 1980s as they are encouraged in school to have careers in ways they never used to; this perhaps is where cultural values and the need to reinforce them emerge. Luckily, Jumoke doesn't mention these expectations coming from her parents which would be a contradiction in terms of paying for private education and having high employment aspirations for their daughter, if the end result is an expectation of marriage before she has an opportunity to gain employment and other benefits from having a good education.

Conclusion

This chapter began by discussing the significant role that whiteness plays within educational environments where there is awareness about the ways it privileges particular groups whilst sidelining others. Moreover, this chapter went on to illustrate how limited previous research has been regarding Black British populations as it rarely paid attention to ethnicity and cultural diversity within these groups. Through participant accounts, the prominent function that ethnicity and cultural identity plays

alongside race was demonstrated through socialisation and upbringing, pointing to the need to acknowledge and include the voices of as many Black British groups - including those of African descent. The next section of this chapter explored social class in relation to the educational experiences of the Black British women graduates. It focused primarily on participants who identified as being middle-class due to much of the previous literature seldom analysing or 'giving voice' to social class differences within Black groups nor centring Black British students who have middle-class backgrounds. The last part of this chapter concentrated on gender differences where participants reflected on their own educational experiences and journeys in comparison to their white girl and Black boy peers. It suggests that whiteness and Blackness can also operate in gendered manners where participants were subject to white feminine standards in terms of beauty and behaviour but felt slightly at an advantage compared to Black British boys within their educational experiences. This shed some light on the unique nature of Black women's educational experiences and journeys and the need to centre these in future research- which is the aim of this study.

Within this chapter, the value of particular theoretical frameworks such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist epistemology where intersectionality is central, alongside Bourdieu's theory of Practice, has been demonstrated in many ways. Such frameworks, especially CRT, have contributed to informing, expanding and adding to conceptual insights by expanding thinking about the role of racism and race which are central features within Western societies; the importance of experiential knowledge and the voices of marginalised groups, as well as the manner in which multiple identities converge to create unique lived experiences.

CRT and Bourdieu's theory of practice enable critical understanding of the role of whiteness within the participants' educational experiences and journeys. CRT

illustrates the nature of the education system in which whiteness was key within it. A Bourdieusian analysis enables the understanding of whiteness as a valuable resource deployed in a way that enables the advancement of (some) white groups and the marginalisation for other non-white groups. Moreover, critical awareness of intersectionality highlights the importance of ethnicity and cultural backgrounds to such analysis. Bourdieu's theory of practice has also been useful too as incorporating his concepts of habitus, capitals and fields provides insights that strengthen analysis on social class as well as the need to add additional frameworks in order to account for the raced dimension. This is a strength of Bourdieu's theory of practice as it can "be brought into complex interplay with other theories that have a more singular focus on one part of human existence (such as race, class gender, and so forth), enabling him to generate a more robust understanding of society than any one of those theories can," (McKnight and Prentice, 2012:77). Lastly, framing the exploration of gender through both CRT and Black Feminist epistemology with the addition of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capitals illustrated the nuanced nature of the educational experiences of Black girls and boys. Black Feminist epistemology nuances our understanding of the gendered manner of whiteness centring Black women's experiences and journeys.

It is hoped that this chapter has contributed to expanding the boundaries of what it means to be Black, British and women within educational contexts. Most importantly, this chapter has asserted and demonstrated that Black British women cannot be viewed as a homogeneous or monolithic group, but rather that their identities are socially constructed, overlapping, evolving and experienced and perceived individually although there may be some collective similarities. The next chapter will illustrate the educational journeys and experiences of the Black British

women graduates, concentrating on their experiences within different educational institutions through two main ways: ‘Being the only one’ or ‘Being one of many’.

CHAPTER 6: 'BEING THE ONLY ONE' OR 'BEING ONE OF MANY' – DIFFERENCES IN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND JOURNEYS BASED UPON TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

Introduction

This chapter will focus on two kinds of educational trajectories[89][90] to examine the characteristics and the different kinds of barriers that participants encounter and navigate along their educational journeys and experiences. I have categorised the first educational trajectory as: 'being the only one' which critically explores the experiences of the Black women graduates through the lens of their experiences of having been educated within predominantly white institutions. This includes institutions such as schools outside of inner cities in suburban areas, as well as grammar or private schools and sixth form colleges within those, and elite or pre-1992 universities. On the other hand, the second trajectory will contrast and compare experiences of 'being one of many' which examines the constructed experiences of the Black women graduates who have studied within institutions where there are higher rates of BAME pupils and students. These typically include multicultural institutions found in inner cities like state schools and sixth form/further education colleges as well as post-1992 universities. It is hoped that an understanding of the experiences within two seemingly distinct spaces- predominantly white and multicultural- will illuminate how the participants' raced, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, classed and gendered identities are

[89] Please note that I have not differentiated the school types in terms of whether they are faith/religious based, single sex/co-education or academies etc. but I do acknowledge that there may be even more differences in educational journeys and experiences based on these considerations.

[90] I am also aware that neither trajectories recommend themselves as both are located within a (white) education system that can be distinguished as inherently racist, classist and sexist, however, findings suggest that the barriers that Black girls and young women face manifest differently depending on the educational context (Gillborn, 1997; 2005, 2006, 2013; Chavous and Cogburn, 2007; Taylor et al, 2009; Evans-Winters, 2013; Smith- Evans and George, 2014; Crenshaw et al, 2015; Dumas, 2016).

reinforced, challenged, and shaped as they journey through the English education system.

This chapter is divided into two parts to address the main barriers identified by participants. The first section will explore accessibility to different types of educational institutions. The second section will consider participants' experiences within different types of educational institutions.

Accessibility

Within this section, participants discuss how accessibility to different types of educational institutions stemmed from possessing two key tools resulting in distinctive outcomes. These were having knowledge about the English education system and therefore being able to prepare to enter and progress within institutions perceived to be better quality and having the finances to pay for tuition fees. Lastly, they also share the different kinds of academic support received in different types of educational institutions.

Knowledge and Preparation

Unlike in previous generations, a small increase in upward social mobility experienced by some parts of Black British communities has resulted in a small number of Black parents gaining the necessary educational credentials and subsequent professional jobs. This has equipped these Black parents with the knowledge and understanding to assist with accessing good educational opportunities

for their children by effective preparation. In a paper by Vincent et al (2012b: 343) about the strategies employed by Black British Caribbean middle-class parents, they define three main categories that they fell into such as: “determined to get the best”, “being watchful and circumspect”, and “a fighting chance”. In the following extracts, Ebony and Adeola demonstrate how their mothers in particular were firmly determined that their daughters would ‘get the best’, where “they were clear about their long-term planning, tutoring, or perhaps moving when children were small into an area with lots of ‘good’ schools,” (Vincent et al, 2012b: 344):

“Since year 3, my mum had me in private tutoring once a week, it was sorta expected that I was gonna go to a grammar school and it didn’t transpire. My mum has always been like “Education’s the key!” Then she went to a local [state school] and she just didn’t really like it and didn’t really like what it was saying, so she just researched good schools in the area and was just like “Ok this one’s good.” Then for uni, my mum was like “You’re not going to an uni that’s not an [elite] uni.” I very much knew that for my mum’s investments to pan out, I would have to go to a good uni, there was no other choice about it.” **(Ebony, 25, British with Jamaican and Guyanese heritage)**

Although Ebony’s mother did not move to a new house or area, Ebony illustrates how she was being prepared by way of private tutoring from a young age in order to put her in a position to pass the entrance exams required for grammar schools. It must be noted that this preparation can only be completed with knowledge and understanding about the stratified nature of the education system and that particular schools are academically selective. However, unfortunately, when Ebony is unsuccessful in passing the grammar school exams, and as her mother is not satisfied with the local state secondary schools in their area, she opts for an alternative option by way of a private fee-paying school for Ebony to attend. Gerwitz et al (1994: 10)

remind us that “whilst material resources greatly enhance choice, having a certain degree of cultural capital ‘in the right currency’ is indispensable for playing the market successfully”. Ebony’s mother can be seen to have demonstrated this. Furthermore, Ebony’s mother’s determination for her daughter to have the best educationally is not limited to her schooling which is emphasised by her desire that she also attends an elite university. This is important to note because educational journeys are linear processes and the type of schools one attends helps to prepare students academically by “endowing their habitus through the insights and experiences of passing on relevant knowledge,” (Crozier et al, 2008: 172) for them to navigate successfully in the next stages. Adeola expresses how she also was prepared to go to her private secondary school:

“I ended up going to a private school for secondary school, so my mum, in preparation for that, there were, at least from year 5, we used to do a lot of prep for entrance exams for that and the local grammar schools. I didn’t know what was going on to be honest, I was just told to sit down and do this. My mum was very new to the whole system, my mum started teaching in [state] secondary school when I was about 7 or 8 and she didn’t like a lot of the schools, particularly the ones that were around our house. She went to a relatively good school back home [in Nigeria] and she wanted her kids to also, she wanted her kids to go to somewhere decent and a lot of the schools around- or at least by my house - they’ve got a lot better - but they were awful at the time. She didn’t want that to be my only option of school to go to or I’d have basically fallen into the wrong crowd or whatever and have those influences so that’s why they sent me to private school.” **(Adeola, 26, Nigerian)**

Unlike Ebony, Adeola’s family did move to a new house in a better area and similarly to Ebony’s experiences, Adeola is given private tutoring in the hopes of successfully gaining a place at a grammar school but is also unsuccessful so ends up

at a private secondary school. A private school is selected because the other local state schools are still not considered as appropriate options due to what is perceived as low standards and limited prospects. While Ebony's extract doesn't talk about her mother's background, Adeola shares that at the time, her mother was new to the English education system having migrated to England from Nigeria as an adult. Ball (2003) claims that some BAME parents, especially those born abroad, are disadvantaged when selecting good schools for their children due to not journeying through the English education system themselves. This makes it harder for them to navigate and understand it, as well as in some cases, language differences. However, due to Adeola's mother's occupation as a secondary school teacher and her own educational background in Nigeria, she is more informed than the parents that Ball (2003) refers to and is 'determined to get the best' (Vincent et al, 2012b) educationally for her children. Moreover, as Gerwitz et al (1994: 10) recognise, Adeola's mother is in an advantaged position as a teacher because "those who work inside the system- teachers, education administrators, governors- are particularly endowed with the right sort of cultural capital…they work in the system [and are]…more able to distinguish between presentational veneer and educational substance," of different schools.

Lastly, Kemi who has a completely different educational trajectory from both Ebony and Adeola discusses her transition from state primary and secondary schools to an academically-selective sixth form in a grammar school, due to her previous negative experiences at her secondary school. The role of her mother can be interpreted as 'being watchful and circumspect,' (Vincent et al, 2012b). By this, such parents have "watchfulness" at the centre and "although achievement is important, these parents lack the intense focus of the 'determined' cluster and tend not to indulge in long-term planning to ensure achievement. Watchfulness is not, however a passive

state. These parents monitor, they ask questions and they act on observations," (Vincent et al, 2012b: 347):

"*I was predicted all Cs [at GCSEs] and when I looked at it I was like "Yeah, I am not getting all Cs," like "You're crazy, it's not gonna happen, I am definitely gonna get better than that." I worked really hard, I would study a lot, I was revising, I took it really seriously. My mum supported me with it, y'know like printing off papers, we were talking to teachers, just trying to get the most out of it really. I suppose cos it was like I wanna leave this school, like I wanna go somewhere else for my sixth form and my mum…we sat down and spoke about it and she explained it all to me and said "Look there is a sequence of events, where you go and what job you eventually get, there's a sequence of events"."* **(Kemi, 24, Nigerian-British)**

In a report about school choice, ethnic segregation and how Black and minority ethnic (BME) parents make educational decisions by Weekes-Bernard (2007: 43), she highlights that there is an awareness amongst BME parents that "the commitment of staff in Black/Asian majority schools was often particularly low…in view of…their perception of BME children as under-achieving and problematic." Therefore, Weekes-Bernard (2007: 44) finds that BME parents that could afford to would move to areas where there were "schools identified as high achieving and, by definition, with a largely White pupil population". This shows the extent of school segregation according to race in the UK (The Challenge et al, 2017). Within her secondary school, Kemi suggests that a similar process happens where she is expected to gain mediocre GCSEs with all 'C' predictions and therefore, her mother intervenes to support her to achieve better results which she is successful in attaining, enabling her to gain entry into an academically-selective grammar school sixth form. Unlike Ebony and Adeola, this preparation begins much later and as a result of her predicted GCSE results. But it is

clear that this is not because her mother is unaware of the processes- just that she has a different approach. It can be argued that Kemi's desire to attend a better educational institution for her A-Levels as well as her mother's discussion about the 'sequence of events' shows that, due to their experiences with the school, they begin to understand that it is important to mobilise themselves in order to 'play the game' effectively in order to "profit from or succeed within the field," (Watson, 2013: 414) of education. They do this by accessing better resources and opportunities that cannot be gained from her current secondary school. This highlights once again, the linear process of the education system, the important roles of mothers[91] in terms of their knowledge to navigate the education system as well as in assisting in preparing their children.[92] Having discussed the role of knowledge and preparation in the accessibility to particular types of schools, the next segment will consider the function that finance assumes.

Finance

Another major factor that can either limit or increase educational opportunities is finance. Bourdieu (1986: 252) notes that finance can be converted into other forms of capital and therefore, by way of gaining entry into particular educational institutions, it is hoped that it will readily provide these additional capitals and thus advantages.

[91] As is the case in the previous examples

[92] I acknowledge that the practices displayed by the Black parents in this sample are not unique to this group as similar high educational aspirations are found amongst for example, British South Asian parents. It must also be noted that, as evidenced by statistics, the results of these similar displays of aspirations operate differently within the education system which I link back to the underlining anti-blackness- as mentioned in chapter 3- that Black students are subject to within the education system (Blair, 1994; Gillborn, 1997; Weekes-Bernard, 2007).

For Sophia, she was unable to benefit from attending a private school which she attributes to lack of finances.

"My dad wanted me to go to a grammar school, then he said he wanted me to go to private school, [but] private schools were too expensive so that was out of the question. So, the next available and well performing school was the one I went to and [it was] in the borough," **(Sophia, 25, Black British)**

When she states that her father wished for her to go to a grammar school and then a private school, Sophia doesn't indicate why he desires those type of schools for his daughter- although it can be assumed that it is because he wants the best for her which he feels these schools will provide. Yet, whether she prepares for instance, with private tuition or even sits the necessary examinations for both types of schools are not evident within her excerpt. She also shows how she becomes limited to 'the next available' option which is a local state 'well performing school.' As Lynch and Moran (2006: 221) reveal, "economic capital is not synonymous with cultural, social or symbolic capital," and therefore, along with having or not having the finance, one must also recognise and understand the educational field to yield the best results (Bodovaski, 2010; Bathmaker et al, 2013). In some respects, then, Sophia's father may fall into the 'Frustrated' category according to Gerwitz et al (1994). This is because, he may have "the inclination to engage with the market but lack[s] the capacity to exploit it in ways which appear to be advantageous to their children," (ibid:8). For instance, academically-gifted children from poorer backgrounds were financially supported by the Assisted Places Scheme[93] introduced by the Conservative

[93] See Tapper and Salter (1986) and Power et al (2013) for more details about the Assisted Places scheme

government in 1980 and even though it ended in 1997, its legacy remains where many private schools still provide means-tested bursaries[94] to help such children attend their schools (Independent schools council, 2016: 10-11). In this way, despite Sophia's father not having the finances, perhaps if he had the knowledge about initiatives like private school bursaries, he may have been able to pursue his desire for Sophia to attend a private school. Conversely, this was the case for Claudia who was granted access to her private secondary school at first with her parents' finances and then with the assistance of a full bursary:

"*When I went on the open day to my secondary school, I walked around and thought "Oh my goodness!" I didn't even know this kinda place existed even though I lived [around the corner]- because it was just so green and big and it had all this artwork that students had made on the walls and the theatre and I was just like this is…cos I was meant to go to my sister's secondary school which is the next…just everyone sorta just went to the same school. And then I went to a few others {names schools} and then I applied for other state schools {names them} and I got into another private school- actually accepted my place and they gave me like a bursary for it- not full but like half, and I was fully on my way to going there and then I got into my secondary school. At first they didn't give me a full bursary, I had to pay full so that was a big decision on my parents' side as to whether or not they wanted me to go there, and I think they fooled themselves a little bit into thinking that they could consistently pay this, like they set- the thing is you can save enough money and that can maybe last a year or two but actually this school was 5 to 7 years. So, for the first year I paid and then we couldn't afford it anymore and then school put me on a full bursary luckily."* **(Claudia, 24, British Ghanaian)**

[94] Although it must be noted that "Bursaries for poorer children to attend these schools are also modest in number and often linked to
having high academic achievement," so they are highly competitive (Green et al, 2017: 9).

Green et al (2017: 8) highlight that the private school sector in the whole of Britain educates "around 7% of children at any one time," and from that small amount, the Independent Schools Council (2018: 14) reports that, 67% are white British students and 33% are minority ethnic[95]. In this way then, private schools can be viewed as elite and exclusionary places which are important to remember especially when "agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and the inaccessible, of what is and is not 'for us'," (Bourdieu, 1990: 64). Therefore, such educational institutions like private schools in essence, are not for the likes of people like Claudia who is a young woman from a working-class, Black background due to its institutional habitus and typical cohort (Reay, 2004). Claudia's insightful account further emphasises the completely different 'world' that she enters into by way of her enrolment within her private school which she first encounters at the open day. Despite it being so close to her home, she had never experienced the luxury of green spaces and the opportunity or resources to participate in Art and Theatre at school before. This entrance into a different 'world' is supported by DeCuir and Dixson (2004) who discuss the racist structural inequalities that prevent African American students from being able to access and benefit from predominantly white private schools which are in affluent areas, extremely well-resourced and provide a well-rounded education. Additionally, when writing about the transition into university by some working-class students, Crozier et al (2008: 172) acknowledge that "working class students are faced with middle class worlds- milieu with which they are or tend to be unfamiliar". It is clear that Claudia goes through a similar experience. She then discusses some of the other

[95] Although it must be noted that it doesn't distinguish between British minority ethnic students and international especially if there is consideration of the growing number of for instance, international students from China who come to get educated in British private schools (Green et al, 2017: 9). This is problematic as there is no data about British BME students in Britain and conflates them with international students.

secondary schools she applied to, like her sister's, other state ones as well as another private school. Interestingly, even though she was awarded a half bursary for the other private school she applied for, she declines the offer because she has set her heart on going to her school. To some extent, Claudia has some privilege compared to many others as her parents are able to finance one year of her private schooling from their own savings however, she notes that this is a struggle and that if she hadn't been given a full bursary from her school, she would not have been able to continue studying there. Once again, this calls attention to how finance within the education system can assist in "the existence of two separate channels, which, like the sacred and profane, are mutually determined by the very relationship of exclusion that unites them," (Bourdieu, 1996:102). This is precisely why it is normal for Black students to assume the position of 'being the only one' in these white, elite spaces as well as their actuality in numbers. Similarly, Deja discusses her own educational journey in relation to what she describes as being 'privileged' educationally but also fraught with struggles in her personal life:

*"I mean coming out now and whenever I tell people I went to a faith based private school to begin with, then I went to an all girls' grammar school, then I went to [pre-1992] university, they assume I'm privileged because of the educational establishments I was in. I make it very clear that I wasn't, it's just those are choices I made, it was all based on academic ability and those were the choices my parents made. Therefore, I still have an individual journey and there were still things I was dealing with. However, being in these environments such as being in a grammar school which is predominantly white and everything, how that influenced me or how my social class did, you know you are at school with girls who have horses, I wouldn't even know where to buy one! But y'know, you are in the same classes as girls who are getting straight A*s, girls who you know are going to get their education paid for, they are not trying to think or worrying where their next meal's coming from. But I chose not to bring my home life into my educational experiences so I think, even if my*

friends knew that I was getting two different buses at the end of school, I didn't really tell them that my postcode was changing every 6 months because we were trying to look for somewhere stable to live because I didn't want to tell them. I developed what they call a poker face of smiling on the outside, not being ingenuine or…But I just didn't want them to see what was going on behind closed doors. So, I didn't allow people to think or assume that I am from a certain class of people because as far as I'm concerned, it's being at school, the focus should be on education and not be on what experiences I am dealing with at home." **(Deja, 23, Black British Caribbean)**

Deja shares her educational journey, illustrating that though she was able to attend private and grammar schools as well as a pre-1992 university, she was afforded this right through her family and her own hard work and her academic achievement. Therefore, in some ways she plays out the notion of meritocracy that underpins English society where "IQ and effort determine individuals' achievement in school regardless of their class or origin," (Souto-Otero, 2010: 399). However, meritocracy has been branded a myth (Bloodworth, 2016; DeCuir and Dixson, 2004) and as shown previously in this chapter, there are many other factors that contribute to the effective navigation of the education system. When she discusses being in a predominantly white and affluent space alongside white, affluent peers, her own working-class background leaves her feeling like a 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979) within this educational context. Yet, she develops a strategy where she separates her home and school life in order to 'get by' and to focus on her education. Such actions that require resilience have been shown to be noticeable amongst students from poorer backgrounds (Mullin and Arce, 2008; Shumba, 2010). Although not mentioned in this section, many participants also share how crucial finance, obtained by getting part-time work and bursaries, on top of student loans, were key in order for them to access and continue on to post-16 education and university study. Therefore,

accessibility can be seen as limited where the pursuit of education becomes a 'debt sentence' (Appel and Taylor, 2015). Attention will now turn to the different kinds of academic support received in different educational institutions.

Academic support

Different educational institutions provide different pupils and students with varying academic support by way of the quality and level of resources, guidance, advice and even encouragement. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: 158) this is a purposeful act where:

> "The different types of curriculum can give very unequal chances of entering higher education. It follows that working-class children pay the price of their access to secondary education by relegation into institutions and school careers which entice them with false pretences of apparent homogeneity only to ensnare them in a truncated educational destiny."[96]

In this way, these institutional differences can potentially create barriers to accessing additional educational opportunities in the future. Janaya reflects upon her own experiences of choosing and applying to secondary school where she felt she wasn't given a fair chance and in effect, could have easily been consigned to 'a truncated educational destiny':

"[When I applied to secondary school] she [my mum] was like "We are gonna apply here, apply here," and we got rejected from all of them- not just me, my friends I grew up with who I am still friends with to this day, they got rejected from the schools they

[96] While Bourdieu and Passeron are referring to a French context, there are similarities in the English context

applied to. Then we got put into {names school} which at that time had a 28% pass rate when it came to A-C GCSEs…[we went through the whole process] it's a bit like when you are doing university [applications] or you are picking a college, so basically you have like a prospectus, you go to the different open evenings and then you just get a feel for what you like and then obviously your parents will be with you as well and then you put down the ones you want to rank highest. The criteria is the catchment area, which schools they feel will fit, closest to your house and things like that, apparently they go off grades from SATs- I think that's rubbish. I just think they saw where you were from and they put you in a school because they felt that's what suits you best if I am being completely honest, because there was a boy that lived down the road from us and he was white and he got a place at {names school},"* **(Janaya, 22, Caribbean)**

The application process for entry into schools in England is one that can itself be viewed as a "field of forces structurally determined by the state of the relations of power among forms of power, or different forms of capital….a field of power struggles among the holders of different forms of power," (Bourdieu,1996: 264). As Janaya shows within her account, her fate was in the hands of the local authority who assigned her to the most suitable school based on particular criteria which she doesn't quite understand, considering she and her friends (who were also Black) were denied a place at a well-performing local state secondary school in which her white neighbour was successful in gaining a place at. Due to the demands of marketisation and rankings, Coldron et al (2010: 23) state how this filters into school selection criteria where it's "in the school's interests to attract children who are, because of their social characteristics or prior attainment, more likely to perform well in…tests," and they also consider "the reputation of the residential areas from which they come." This inevitably leads to inequality in educational opportunity and access as the better performing schools seek to select and create an institutional habitus for 'ideal' students who are

often white and middle-class in opposition to undesirable Black students (Youdell, 2003; Rollock 2007a; Hamilton, 2018). Moreover, the fact that there is school segregation in terms of race and ethnicity suggests that this phenomenon may be occurring across the country (Bagley, 1996; Johnston et al, 2004; Burgess et al, 2005; Johnston et al, 2006; Weekes-Bernard, 2007; The Challenge et al, 2017). Janaya continues to share her educational experiences as a student within her low-performing, multicultural state secondary school:

[The secondary school I went to] had such a bad reputation and she [my mum] was like "Put down your head and work" and that's what I did. I just worked through it and then the school turned into an academy and it just shifted focus from…they stopped caring about the kids in my opinion, it was more about the results and you could see it in the way they dressed us, in the way they talked to us, the lunch times being cut down, it was very much academic, very much hit your quota so we can get our funding. But it did well, it boosted it up from 28% to 98% so it worked, but at the same time the relationships with teachers were never the same. I would've loved to experience a grammar school, I know a lot of people that have been to grammar school and their outlook on the world is completely different to the ones I went to secondary school with. It's just like I said, when you're in a mediocre, just kinda 'getting by' school and you're the best in that school, then you feel like "Yeah, I'm the don, I'm amazing," whereas they [students at grammar school] have to fight- dog eat dog- to get that grade, they understand the whole cat nature of the world, it's not about you're a big fish in a small pond whereas they are in a big ass pond and they've gotta start swimming quick and you can see the difference when you start to get into the real world and the work platforms. When you are applying for jobs, it's not the same, they've got more velocity, they want it whereas we want it but when the hard work comes, we are like {makes voice high-pitched} "Oh no!" {laughs}" **(Janaya, 22, Caribbean)**

The marketisation of the English education system where good results are the main priority is demonstrated by Janaya's account when her school transitions to become an academy[97]. When she talks about the new emphasis on dress and behaviour, this speaks to the idea that many working-class and Black pupils are "perceived within dominant frameworks of values as being deficient," (Exley, 2013: 78) and therefore in need of harsher disciplinary school policies to supplement for their insufficiencies. Within US educational contexts, Kupchik (2009) expands on Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990: 294) notion of cultural reproduction explaining that the:

> "schools' disciplinary practices mirror…state punishment…[where schools for] mostly lower-income youth and youth of color prepare students to live under close watch by the State by subjecting them to frequent police surveillance and harsh punishments for misbehaviors; in contrast…schools with mostly wealthier, white students teach skills that empower them to avoid, manage and control such risks, or to use these elements of control to their social, professional and economic advantage".

Janaya then fantasises about the opportunities and kinds of academic support that she would have received had she attended a grammar school. These differences in academic support are not a figment of Janaya's imagination as Abrahams (2018) substantiates this when she delineates in her paper comparing three types of schools: one private, one state in an affluent area and one state in a disadvantaged area. She finds that there are marked distinctions in terms of subject choice provisions at GCSE

[97] "Academies are publicly funded but, unlike maintained schools, they are independent of local authorities. They have more freedoms, for example in setting staff pay and conditions and determining their own curriculum. Academy schools are part of academy trusts, which are charitable companies directly funded by, and accountable to, the Department. The Department's underlying objective for academies is that they should improve educational standards in schools," (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2018: 4).

and A-Level stages; the kinds of career advice and guidance given as well as the facilities available to the different cohorts of students within each of the schools. This leads her to categorise the private and the affluent state schools as engaging in 'institutional concerted cultivation' in comparison to the disadvantaged state school which exercises 'constrained cultivation.' By this, she means that the private and the affluent state schools are:

> "actively working to cultivate their pupils to take up dominant positions in society…[and] through their privileged position in the field, are able to draw upon extensive resources to enable pupils to 'keep their options open' through imposing minimal institutional restriction upon subject combinations alongside careful moulding and packaging through careers advice and guidance,' (Abrahams, 2018:13).

In comparison the disadvantaged state school "is working within a framework of restrictions…with limited resources alongside political pressures around particular measures of improvement, they face constraints in relation to supporting pupils into destinations in an unrestricted manner," (Abrahams, 2018:13). Janaya references this in terms of the perceived advantages and behaviours she has encountered from people educated in grammar schools who she has to compete with in the labour market. This awareness of the differences in academic support according to type of educational institution is echoed by Yasmin:

"I don't like the English education system, I feel like unless you have private schooling, or you go to a grammar school, you're not forced enough and I feel like when I think about myself, had I have gone to a grammar school or private school, I feel as though I could've been a better me at the moment do you know what I mean? I found that being in a state school, you kinda - although they still support you cos you are on the 'gifted and talented' list or whatever it is - you don't get as much support as you

*would've, had you been in a school that is predominantly focusing on your performance and nothing else, do you know what I mean? And it's sad because I don't feel like, yes there is gonna be weaker people, there is gonna be stronger people, but I don't think everyone gets an equal chance in terms of learning, because I mean you have inconsistencies with teachers, so you have supply teachers today, supply teachers tomorrow, you're not having consistency in learning and the children are not being pushed enough and it's sad and then they expect them to do…they are predicted to get A*s but they are only capable of a C and then, the statistics then become inconsistent and inaccurate because actually you predicted somebody who you knew would never ever get that high achieving and it just makes you look like you are failing y'know and it's just sad.*" **(Yasmin, 24, Black Caribbean)**

As well as asserting the academic support that she feels she lacked due to her attendance at a state secondary school, she also seems to think of her educational experiences and journey in terms of relative failure based on the opportunities she believes she would have been afforded had she had private or grammar school education. But for Bourdieu (1999: 424) one of the functions of the school system is that it:

> "produces more and more individuals affected by this chronic malaise created by more or less repressed experience of complete or relative failure at school [and] they are obliged to bluff nonstop, for others and for themselves, with a permanently flayed, wounded or mutilated self-image."

Moreover, Yasmin indicates that at times certain schools set their students up to fail by way of predicting them unattainable grades in order to keep up with their targets. Additionally, this lack of academic support which she describes can be seen as another deliberate injustice where "students who come from the most disadvantaged families, especially children of immigrants, [are] often left to fend for

themselves, from primary school on, [and] are obliged to rely either on the dictates of school or on chance to find their way in an increasingly complex universe," (Bourdieu, 1999: 424).

In order to provide an alternative educational experience, the last extract in this section is from Claudia who reinforces the different types of academic support based on what she received at her private secondary school:

"[At my school] you were taught networks were the way you get further and unfortunately, I think that's a failing within the education system, cos sometimes we try and lie to people and say "It's your academic ability"- no it's not. There're some mediocre people doing great jobs that they should definitely never be in, but they had good networks. I think that's the difference, I think that is one of the key differences between private school and like normal secondary schools as well, they don't lie to you about that, they tell you "It's the networks so go out and make them!"" **(Claudia, 24, British Ghanaian)**

In many ways, Claudia gives prominence to the saying 'it's not *what* you know but *who* you know,' and Bourdieu (1986: 248-49) labels this as social capital in which "membership in a group -…provides each of its members backing of the collectively-owned capital a "credential" which entitles them to credit them in various senses of the word." Through 'membership' in her private, elite school as a student, which is only accessible to a limited few who possess the right amount of economic and cultural capital, she is able to benefit from being given advantageous cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) as a 'hidden curriculum'[98] alongside her academic studies. This resonates with

[98] "The hidden curriculum is an implicit curriculum that expresses and represents attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors, which are conveyed or communicated without aware intent; it is conveyed indirectly by words and actions that are parts of the life of everyone in a society," (Alsubaie, 2015: 125; Jerald, 2006)

the findings of Abrahams (2018: 13) when she writes how at the private school in her study “pupils are trained in the rules of the game, provided with powerful contacts and taught how to mobilise and capitalize upon them effectively.” These are some of the distinguishing features of private educational institutions which Finn (2012: 59) equally asserts:

> “develop in students class-consciousness and class solidarity; feelings of importance and entitlement; certitude in their values, knowledge, and beliefs; and faith in meritocracy. They provide students cultural capital, social capital, essay-text literacy, and grounding in *realpolitik*. These attitudes and skills are entirely compatible with the self-interest of their students who are drawn from the power elite or are border-crossers eager to join the power elite,” [emphasis in original]

Yet, as well as differences found between different types of educational institutions, it is important to note that “within the same school, institutional habituses are mobilised differentially for different pupils,” (Reay, 1998: 524). In this regard, even though there are different advantageous experiences and journeys shared by some participants compared to others based on the educational institutions they attended, it must be noted that the whiteness of the entire education system means that many Black students are disadvantaged regardless of where they are educated. This is where an added reading and focus of race within this is useful because “the impact of racial and ethnic disadvantage makes the issue of knowledge and choice particularly problematic, both because of the lack of requisite social expertise and knowledge of the system within particular communities and because of the structural constraints on the choices available to parents in economically deprived areas,” (Weekes-Bernard, 2007: 1). As is evident, class distinctions are integral when it comes to being able to

possess the necessary tools in order to provide access to better resourced and better performing educational institutions for participants. This has been demonstrated in terms of knowledge, preparation and finances[99]. However, it must be acknowledged that many of the 'good' educational institutions were those that were predominantly white (Weekes-Bernard, 2007) and where participants are likely to be the only one there. In contrast, the more poorly-resourced schools were multicultural and where participants were one of many. This calls out deliberate actions that show the "prolonged, targeted cultural devaluation of black children and blatant maldistribution of educational resources, along racial (and class) lines [that] affect how black subjects make meaning of schooling, their racialized bodies in relation to schooling, and the role of education and educational institutions in assuring the collective linked fate of an entire people," (Dumas, 2014: 23).

Experiences within different educational institutions

Based on 'being the only one' or 'being one of many', this section explores how within predominantly white educational institutions barriers include having to navigate whiteness and being positioned as "outsiders within". In terms of within multicultural institutions, 'being one of many' means that there is more strength in increased numbers of BAME students, which can somewhat weaken barriers. However, many of the participants are characterised as "the unruly Black girl" within these spaces.

[99] In which lack of can still be countered by relevant knowledge of financial assistance as is the case here

'Being the only one'

Navigating Whiteness

In an article critiquing the manner in which Bourdieu's forms of capital are defined by middle-class white standards, Yosso (2005) argues instead, for the understanding of the community cultural wealth present within communities of colour. In a similar way, I advocate that the participants that were educated within predominantly white and in particular, elite educational institutions are faced with the barrier of navigating whiteness to survive within the space and therefore, they acquire what I believe to be a valuable skill. This is because, the ability to navigate whiteness, is what Yosso (2005: 80) terms as "navigational capital- the ability to manoeuvre through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind". The role of families, other networks as well as additional factors are also very significant in these abilities and will be discussed in the next chapter. In addition, not all predominantly white institutions provide the same level of 'white elite insider' knowledge that comes from successful navigation of elite white spaces. This is because it is highly dependent on class where for instance, elite institutions that are mostly the preserve of upper- and middle-class white groups enjoy "relative autonomy…by virtue of their symbolic, cultural, social and economic capital," (Zanten, 2009: 330; Bourdieu, 1996). In this sense, even white working-class individuals and groups find it hard to navigate within elite whiteness (Crozier et al, 2008 Ingram, 2009; Reay et al, 2009; Finn; 2012; Thiele et al, 2017). This misfit between working-class whiteness within elite white spaces was encountered by Claudia in her own experiences:

"I guess [in my school] we had the luxury of having a place where you had the teachers, the time and the resources to do it, that's the difference. So, I think it definitely shaped my view of the world in terms of thinking that everyone matters and that everyone should have the opportunity. It also definitely made me feel sad cos there were some people there who were excellent, who were so smart- some of the smartest people I've ever met who the environment of the school- cos they were from working-class backgrounds, they'd got- their parents had hustled, decided to get them in, people that may have been the next…I don't know cured Cancer or something, but the environment that they were in at home just did not allow them to function in that school and ultimately some of them dropped out. It's sad because if they can't function where some people actually want them to succeed, they might not even function in somewhere where people have little time for them," **(Claudia, 24, British Ghanaian)**

Claudia's white working-class friends who dropped out of her elite private school are represented as being 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). In fact, Reay et al (2009: 1105) suggests that this is a common encounter for working-class students in elite universities whose habitus creates a "mismatch between high status university and a low-status social background produc[ing] a dearth of opportunities for self-affirmation at university, creating tension and unease". In addition, this mismatch is based on the institutional habitus that elite institutions embody where it operates within "myriad, subtle, yet pervasive ways to invalidate working-class identities," (Reay, 1998: 12). Interestingly, Claudia considers herself to also be from a working-class background, and although as previously discussed, she does feel a bit out of place in this new 'world', she is able to endure this mismatch and thrive in her elite private secondary school. As a Black girl or woman, to successfully navigate within white, elite spaces is a remarkable skill, precisely because these exclusionary spaces are historically located within different raced, classed *and* sometimes gendered discourses (Jones, 2006; Wright et al, 2007; Epstein, 2014;

Rollock, 2014). Horvat and Antonio (1999: 337) discuss the experiences of African American girls studying at a predominantly white, elite high school, highlighting the role of race, class and habitus in their experiences and write that although being in such a space came at great psychological costs, "one specific benefit they derived was that they learned to navigate the often tricky terrain of life in the white world around them". Simply being unfazed and indeed comfortable in these spaces is one manifestation of this ability to navigate whiteness as exemplified by Claudia:

"*My experience is…so a great example is I met someone who she'd gone…she's from [names place], probably lived around the corner from me but we had different school experiences. Her primary school and secondary school were predominantly Black, so coming to university for her was really a shock because she's like "I actually don't think I have been around this many white people and I feel so isolated." Whereas that wasn't a shock for me, it was more the sorta, more nuanced things actually trying your identity so, I can't- I don't think you can pin it down to anything cos actually some people have that shock later. They actually are, like the identity thing and feeling out of place might not even happen in secondary school, they might be chilled until then and then they might go to uni and be like "Wow!" My sister's friend said that shock only happened to her in the workplace."* **(Claudia, 24, British Ghanaian)**

When Claudia shares that her Black friend who was unfamiliar with white elite spaces experiences a shock once she enters university, as well as her sister's friend only encountering hers in the workplace, this emphasises that at some point, "black people are required to navigate the white space as a condition of their existence," (Anderson, 2015: 10). Yet, as illustrated in the previous extract, not all are able to do so with ease. For Grace, her ability to navigate white spaces is largely attributed to being able to adapt and draw on her Nigerian culture in order to engender a sense of comfort and a resource in what would be an isolating experience:

"Secondary school as well again, like living with people, like I remember being in my first induction class and I was the only Black person there and I was just like "Wow!" I have never been in a situation like this coming from my primary school. In university as well, less of a minority but still very much a minority too so, we stood out and we were obviously a lot more different than everyone else. So adapting to that situation and the people and being able to basically have that Nigerian culture there and that be a strong part of my identity there, but at the same time being able to adapt and be in a completely white environment as well and feel comfortable enough there too. I think those experiences have helped to shape me and we all need that. I feel that being closed off where ever you're from is a very like- imagine you go to a school and it's all white children, those white children have never seen anyone of a different colour and they are going to have very different views going forward in adult life because they have never experienced mixing with other people." **(Grace, 24, Nigerian-British)**

In a similar fashion that Claudia describes the initial shock when encountering whiteness for the first time, Grace's own shock occurred when she starts at her suburban boarding school. Additionally, Modood (2004) and Shah et al (2010) write about how young South Asians are able to achieve educational success, in spite of other disadvantages, by having 'ethnic capital.' This instills within them cultural foundations that include "an important triad: familial adult-child relationships, transmission of aspirations and attitudes and norms enforcement," (Modood, 2004: 100) that can equip them to navigate within educational spaces. This is supported in research (Coultas, 1989; Miller and MacIntosh, 1999; Phelps, 2001; Payne and Suddler, 2014; Brittian et al, 2015) who report the role of strong ethnic and racial identification as tools used by Black students to mediate their experiences within educational contexts. Moreover, Grace puts forward an important point at the end about the need for diversity in *all* student's educational experiences which can extend beyond racialised difference to create culturally informed, open-minded adults. This

has not gone unnoticed by some white middle-class families who seek to educate their children in ethnically diverse educational institutions (Ball, 2003; Reay et al, 2008; Bryne and Tona, 2013). Moving on from this, Simone recounts her own process of navigating in her predominantly white and elite university, providing examples of her interactions with her white peers:

"*I just found it really difficult to get course-mates because it felt like being the only Black girl, I didn't feel like I could have a genuine interaction. I didn't feel like there was anything to talk about, I didn't feel like- I don't know I just felt like really…I'd never felt like that before cos obviously in the schools that I had come from, they were very multicultural and I was never a minority and I never had to…It felt like I was being asked to beg people, to introduce myself like "I'm nice" or whatever and it was like no, I don't wanna do that. I always felt I had to…there was always…before I say, before I start speaking to you naturally, I have to show you who I am, do you know what I mean? I never felt like I could just sit down in the group and be like "Oh what do you guys think?" {laughs} No! first I have to show that I am not loud or that the fact that I wear this necklace doesn't mean to offend you, do you know what I mean? I felt like I had to explain everything before I could just speak. I don't think I overcame it, I think I just started to not care and sometimes it was good, sometimes it would be like- oh actually, there was some people in my class who I'd be like "Oh I thought you were like this, but actually you've taken quite well to me," or if I've put something out there about the racism in this Shakespearean work, you wouldn't flinch like some of the others. Oh my gosh! In one class, this girl was scared to say the word "Black" she stuttered for like 5 minutes to say the word "Black" when talking about Othello and it's just moments like that, I'm sat next to you and you're talking about "Bl..Bl..Bl..Bl..Bl..Black" like, do you know what I mean? It's stuff like that where, by the time I get to third year that doesn't hurt anymore. But in first year I'd be like "Oh my gosh, what did I do? I'm so sorry." If I wasn't in that class, she would be like yeah "BLACK" like "Black" like she'd be fine but…do you know what I mean? It felt like because I was there it was like "Oh is this…we are not allowed to mention the fact that Othello is Black," do you understand? That was…that experience basically summed*

up being Black and studying English Lit {laughs} constantly having to apologise or speak over or just ignore." **(Simone, 21, Caribbean British)**

Simone's feelings that she initially lacks 'genuine interaction' with her peers as well as having to prove herself and her presence within the space can be an attribute to the perception of both parties that they have nothing in common based upon race and class differences[100]. This perception is substantiated by Mayhew et al (1995) who extend social distance theory to explain how differences in social position between individuals requires added social energy in order for meaningful interactions to occur. This theory is extended in a study by Lewis (2012) and utilising social energy can be a frustrating, challenging and emotionally draining process. When Simone remembers an incident within her class where an uncomfortable discussion about race/Blackness takes place, Gusa (2010) and Bennett and Lee-Treweek (2014) identify her peers demonstrating "white blindness" which is, "the overwhelming heterodoxy of whiteness and the orthodoxy that prevents race from being discussed openly," (Benett and Lee-Treweek, 2014: 36). Simone also illustrates that the ability to navigate whiteness develops overtime where, when she was new to it, she felt like she had to 'apologise' for disrupting the space, she then challenges it by speaking over it and eventually ignores it which is bolstered by finding or carving out alternative spaces within whiteness which she shares she does within the rest of the interview. According to Nayak (1997: 60), within his study of Black and minority ethnic pupils negotiating whiteness in school contexts, he asserts that their accounts "exposed the practice and privileges of whiteness". Jumoke discusses her ability to navigate whiteness through her education and how it assisted in her job:

[100] Yet it must be noted that there may be differences based on migration patterns for example, being more recently arrived from Africa vs. several generations from the Caribbean and historical experiences of Black British groups with the education system, along with social class differences which may influence how they navigate within whiteness

"I feel like if I didn't have that middle-class background, there are a lot of situations that I would've felt uncomfortable. So, even for example where I work now, it's very middle class, like very Oxbridge, white man who has been to every continent since he was a child. So I feel like in a sense, I am able to relate a bit more. Like especially when I am in the office and I speak and they hear my- well I don't think I have an accent - I think everyone sounds like me, but when they hear my accent, they are a bit taken aback and I don't know what they expect. Maybe they expect me to sound like I am from I don't know…but that is always quite funny to me. I know exactly…I had a private school education, sometimes it makes me feel a bit good to be a bit underestimated and then when I speak my Queen's English it just baffles them and they don't know what to make of it at all!" **(Jumoke, 23, Black British of Nigerian heritage)**

Jumoke's display of "class signifiers" (Rollock, 2014: 446) such as her private school education and accent facilitate her movement and ease within white elite spaces. Her private schooling experiences have enabled her to gain understandings and knowledge about the workings of middle-class whiteness which she is able to deploy both intentionally and subconsciously within her future experiences in the workplace. Yet, the fact that her white peers are 'taken back' by her indicates what Schwarz (2016) asserts as a form of symbolic violence founded upon the symbolic economy of authenticity where, despite her middle-class background and education, she will always be seen as inauthentic within these spaces because of her Blackness and possibly gender as well. Moreover as Andersen (2015: 19) contributes "the black body faces acute challenges to its everyday life and existence, most commonly in what many blacks have come to perceive categorically as the white space," and for Jumoke, such acute challenges include the utter shock of her white peers whenever she speaks.

By virtue of the ability to navigate whiteness gained from being educated within elite, predominantly white educational institutions, I contend that these Black women graduates are equipped with advantages that can assist in their movement within other white spaces with relative ease compared to their working-class white and Black peers who haven't had similar educational experiences and journeys. Additionally, they will most likely transmit this skill to their children when helping them to navigate their own educations. The ability to navigate whiteness can also be seen as a wider and bigger project where it is "the goal…for students of colour to engage whiteness while simultaneously working to dismantle it," however, "in order to confront whiteness, they have to be familiar with it," (Leornardo, 2002: 31). Claudia, Grace, Simone and Jumoke have gained familiarity with whiteness and how to navigate within it. Yet, it must be recognised that this navigation is not easy and not all Black women are able to do so which creates barriers to both entering and surviving within such educational places.

So far, this section has focused on participants educated within predominantly white and elite spaces and how they gain the ability to navigate whiteness in order to survive and thrive. It is put forward that this is a form of capital due to the benefits they can reap from this and how it can be translated elsewhere. The following part of the section will discuss the positions that participants occupy within these same predominantly white spaces.

"Outsiders within"

As advocated by Collins (1986; 1990; 1999), the "outsider within" status is appropriate to understanding the inconsistent ways in which Black women in particular

are positioned within white spaces such as the academy. This position constitutes “a social group’s placement in specific, historical context of race, gender, and class inequality,” (Collins, 1999: 85) which firmly takes into consideration the intersectionality of Black women’s identities. I extend this status to incorporate the experiences of the Black women in this study who are educated within predominantly white institutions who in a similar way are permitted to enter on the one hand, but marginalised, never completely feeling or fully allowed to be part of the happenings on the other; or in the words of hooks (1990: 149) “be part of the whole but outside the main body”. However, Collins also notes that there are different dimensions to being an “outsider within” where those that have gained access within these spaces can obtain advantages such as becoming “privy to some of the most intimate secrets of white society,” (Collins, 1986: S14). This is what had been alluded to previously by way of some of the participants who had to navigate elite whiteness because of the type of educational institution they attended. I deemed this as a form of capital.

Yet, being an “outsider within” can also be a challenging endeavour in that, regardless of how long Black women occupy these marginal positions within white spaces, “their outsider allegiances may militate against their choosing full insider status,” (Collins, 1986: S26) and moreover, is “bound to generate tension, for people who become outsiders within are forever changed by their new status,” (ibid, S29). Collins’ observations and interpretations regarding the “outsider within” are very similar to the ones shared by the participants within this study where they have entered into places within these spaces, yet their experiences show that although there may be some benefits garnered from their positions, they often have to grapple with additional barriers due to ‘being the only one’ within such spaces. Class is also significant here because of the type of educational institution where its institutional

habitus may have an impact due to how it "exerts a powerful influence on how [different students] see themselves and are seen by others in terms of their learner identities," (Reay et al, 2010:115).

One of the ways that the participants share that they grapple with their positions is with the constant awareness of their differences which they believe makes them stand out within their institutions. The main source of this stems from their raced and classed identities[101] which they believe contrasts a great deal to the whiteness they are surrounded by (Bhopal, 2018: 22). In the extract below, Adeola outlines the manner in which over the course of her schooling, she learns to adapt to her environment and how over time it becomes easy to do as she develops two versions of herself, one of which she refers to as her "school self" and the other as her "old self". Moreover, she emphasises the tensions and cultural shock that one encounters when first becoming immersed within whiteness and gaining an "outsider within" position:

"I think as the years went by, you very much got used to it, you became your school self when you were in the school gates and at school functions, and then when you got down the hill back to where you lived, you became- and you weren't the only Black person for 10 miles- you became {laughs} very…you reflected back into your old self. But when you first start, I think for us, we hadn't been to a different school in terms of secondary school other than primary school, we just accepted that this is going to be the norm for you…you just, because it becomes your norm, you are used to being the only Black person in that class really, you are used to there being only 2 of you, and you just keep it moving and be like "Fine, this is it today"." **(Adeola, 26, Nigerian)**

[101] they don't explicitly mention gender in their stories

In some ways, Adeola's reflections refer to what the scholar W.E.B DuBois (1989: 6) terms as 'double consciousness' to express the internal conflict felt by African-Americans whose Black and American identities are incompatible with each other because they represent "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder". In other words, DuBois is highlighting how African-Americans have never really belonged within American society due to factors like racism which continuously position them as "an outcast and a stranger in mine own house," (DuBois, 1989: 6). Within the context of her schooling, Adeola notes how 'being the only one'[102] has different responses based upon how long one has been within the context and the kind of support they have. For her, she learns how to 'manage' her two selves and act in accordance to what is expected in this space which she implies is not her "old self." A similar manifestation of this internal conflict is prominent within the work of Fanon (1952: 1) who writes about the peculiar location of Black people within (white) society who must develop different versions of themselves in order to fit in more effortlessly, asserting that "the black man possesses two dimensions: one with his fellow Blacks, the other with the Whites. A black man behaves differently with a white man than he does with another Black man". In many ways, both DuBois and Fanon also speak to Collins' "outsider within" hypothesis which Adeola eloquently relays within her account. Additionally, Adeola calls attention to the unmarked boundaries of whiteness in which she feels that her true (Black) "old self" does not truly belong within and is instead left "down the hill." This is discussed by Rollock (2014: 446) when she illustrates the Black middle-classes who possess the relevant "*class signifiers*" to the white middle-classes which "facilitate access" as well as "a *certain* acceptance within, mainly white (middle

[102] or one of very few other Black students

class) spaces but crucially, they also disturb the fixed, stereotypical perceptions that many whites hold about blacks,"[emphasis in original]. This may also be another reason why Adeola keeps her "old self" firmly hidden "down the hill" throughout her schooling. Shakirah shares the role of her teachers in this process of "othering" her and making her feel like an "outsider within":

"*I suppose they [teachers] just thought I was the problematic Black child to be frank. I wasn't small and petite and cute, I was {laughs} do you know what I mean? I wasn't…I didn't just hide, I didn't…if I was in a room you would know I was there even though I was only young. At the time looking back it was definitely…cos looking back I was overtly different and like I said it's a majority white school as well so me sorta being in that classroom setting, everybody was very different from me straightaway. Then also I was quite loud and bubbly, and I would like to crack jokes and it was quite funny to me, and I was always classed as being rude and my personality was always taken as being rude and I was getting in trouble, getting sent outside the class. I would always complain to my mum and I would explain the situation and say "I don't understand" and I would say this is what I did and she would say "No you can't, they'll see that as being rude and you can't do this or this." So I wasn't a rude child but I was very expressive and I was always taught by my parents that if I don't understand something, to ask and have it explained- so if the teachers would say something to me I would challenge them on certain things {laughs}*" **(Shakirah, 23, British Jamaican)**

For every student, the role of the teacher is substantial but within the context of this research, their role is implicitly and at times explicitly embedded with unequal power relations afforded by the power of whiteness and the ways in which it can be enacted within the experiences and journeys of Black girls (Wright, 2010). In fact, Cui (2017) emphasises that through teachers' 'racialised habitus', their "conscious or unconscious race-related beliefs, remarks and actions…structure their ways of teaching formal curriculum, and how this can unwittingly reinforce unequal social

identities and social relations between groups," (Cui, 2017). It seems from Shakirah's account, that her teachers weren't used to dealing with a Black child and also unwittingly reinforced their negative assumptions and treatment towards her. Rollock (2007a) further finds that teachers have a perceived notion of what a 'successful' student should look and behave like and often Black students do not fit into these perceptions. Moreover, it has been argued that there is a need for more Black teachers within the schooling of Black children because they are able to understand and relate to them much better than white teachers can (Blair, 1994; Maylor, 2009). Therefore, the ways in which Shakirah notes that she is 'quite loud', 'bubbly' and 'expressive' may not be perceived as being disruptive but more so, her personality which can be channeled into something productive instead of being disciplined for it. In addition, cultural/racialised differences become apparent when Shakirah shares that she has been brought up to challenge what she doesn't understand which can be seen as being defiant instead of simply assertive (Carter, 2005; Wright 2010). Following on from this, Crozier (1994) discusses how such student behaviour, which has often been misread, can create unintentional power battles where the teacher - who isn't familiar with dealing with Black students- just seeks to avoid conflict and maintain control resulting in their harsher treatment to Black students. According to the Department for Education (2018b: 5) "**all** school and college staff have a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which children can learn," [emphasis in original]. As will be clear from Jumoke's experiences below, due to what can be interpreted as her teacher's positioning of her as an "outsider within", she was not able to enjoy this:

"*I remember it so vividly, there was this issue, somebody was stealing people's stuff, pencil cases would go missing, jackets would go missing, makeup would go missing*

and I remember in year 8 and year 9 there was this one particular girl who they used to blame for…she was a Black girl and she was friends with another kinda racially ambiguous girl and they were blamed because they were kinda weird and they hung out together. And then when it got to year 9, it was my turn to be blamed and I remember it so vividly. It was a sports day and they- for some reason- we just weren't in the classrooms; we were all just out and about so somebody left their purse on the chair to see if I would take it. I remember thinking "Do these people think I am stupid?" Like I don't get it…so that wasn't a good time and then the summer of year 9, a girl that I was quite good friends with accused me of stealing her makeup and I remember that day because she called me out of my classroom and was like "Why did you steal my makeup? I know you took it" or something like that, and she spat at me and she literally attacked me {laughs}. I remember that day cos I had acrylic nails on which wasn't allowed so I don't know why I had those on. I remember when she spat at me I had lunged for her and went to grab her - this is so violent, I am not a violent person by the way- but I lunged for her, it was a reaction and I was kinda cornered by a bunch of other girls. For me, now that I am a bit older, I do feel like the school should have done more to protect me but {sighs} I mean it's difficult when you are the only Black person. You don't have any people to fight for you because even the teachers that were supposed to fight for me, or at least just say "Leave the poor girl alone" didn't, and sometimes they would encourage [it]. There was one teacher in particular, she was a PE teacher and I remember she called the police in during a pastoral session. I was going on a school trip to New York so I wasn't actually in that pastoral session. But when I got back, obviously I heard that the police had been called in and they were saying how they were gonna arrest the person who had been stealing, and so the PE teacher, she got on with the popular sporty girls, so she would bitch about me to them. It's only now that I am older that I realise that actually that was wrong and it used to make me feel so isolated and it ruined year 10 and 11." **(Jumoke, 23, Black British of Nigerian heritage)**

Within an article investigating the experiences of African Caribbean and African American students in predominantly white secondary schools, Chapman and Bhopal (2018: 12) uncover the process of 'racial surveillance' which they explain as "racial

stereotypes…becom[ing] manifested in ways that racial minority students are criminalised by school adults…[and these students] suffer from a double-standard of discipline and surveillance in majority white schools". As is clear from Jumoke's excerpt, she notes how herself, another Black girl as well as a "racially ambiguous" non-white girl are automatically perceived to be the likely suspects responsible for the spate of thefts in the school. Moreover, the fact that the other students are confident enough to join in the racial surveillance by setting a test where "somebody left their purse on the chair to see if [Jumoke] would take it", as well as physically assaulting her by spitting at her is another indication about the hostility of the environment that she is located within and how her presence as an "outsider within" or the 'other' "threaten[s] the moral and social order," (Collins, 1990: 68). There is literature that touches upon the disproportionate and unfair way that Black students as a whole are disciplined by teachers within educational contexts based on the teachers' conscious and unconscious biases like Black people being stereotyped as thieves, muggers and therefore it is easy to be suspected as a thief (Annamma et al, 2016; Edwards, 2016; Gregory and Roberts, 2017; Fergus, 2017; Morris and Perry, 2017; Anyon et al, 2018). For Jumoke, this implicit teacher bias meant that she was not protected, nor did she receive a fair investigation into the accusations made against her. In addition, the fact that one of her teachers thought it was necessary to bring the police to the school shows how this situation could have easily escalated rapidly and potentially left Jumoke with a criminal record which resonates with and fuels the 'school to prison pipeline' written about extensively in the US, disproportionately affecting Black students (Ward, 2014; Cuellar and Markowitz, 2015; Bryan, 2017; Owens, 2017; Grace and Nelson, 2018).

Chapman and Bhopal (2018: 2) also express how in predominantly white institutions, the presence of Black and minority ethnic students "disrupts the racial and cultural homogeneity in these contexts," leading to "particular academic and social challenges in these learning environments." There is much research (Fuller, 1980; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Youdell, 2003; Rollock, 2007a; Rhamie, 2012; Gillborn et al, 2012; Hamilton, 2018) to show the role of teachers in maintaining and reproducing racial inequity within schools, most commonly carried out through labelling, having lower expectations and negatively stereotyping Black pupils and students. As stated by Cline et al (2002), many teachers who taught within predominantly white schools do not have much experience or contact with students from ethnic minority backgrounds nor have they ever received training about how to properly engage and understand ethnic minority pupils' cultural backgrounds. This can result in "various acts of racism - direct and indirect - in the delivery of schooling through teachers' assumptions, assessments and behaviour management decisions," (Doharty, 2018: 2). Joy communicates one way that she remembers her teacher's indirect racist assumptions about her academic ability:

"I'll be top set in maths right and if my maths teacher would ask questions of "Who wants to come and explain it?" Whenever I put my hand up, he was like "Oh really?" Just surprised that I get it, do you know what I mean? I feel like that affected my confidence and just my willingness to do well. I didn't really participate in class and study so when it came to exam period and stuff, it was just stressful for me cos I felt I had to do well and I think just being aware of I guess microaggressions that I had missed growing up- actually no, knowing that but not actually being able to place where those things were coming from." **(Joy, 23, British Ghanaian)**

The fact that Joy is in the top set of her Maths class *and* passed an 11+ entrance exam in order to gain entry into her school proves that she is academically

capable yet, her Maths teacher is still not convinced, nor does he hide it. In a study about how Black middle-class parents support their children within similar types of schools that Joy attended, Vincent et al (2012b: 350) share that, like Joy, "in White-dominated fields…[they] have their cultural and social capital devalued, rejected and treated as illegitimate." This is also a way for those with the upper-hand to assert their power and privilege through the "interrogation of location in social space," (O'Donoghue, 2013:192). Joy's account represents these negative discourses and the real consequences which for her became her lack of confidence. In some ways, it can be said that Joy internalised her teacher's racist assumptions of her ability and she began to exhibit the self-fulfilling prophecy by no longer participating in class or studying for her exams. Joy also discusses not being able to identify or make sense of her experiences until much later on when she learnt about microaggressions which supports the use of retrospective reflection.

'Being one of many'

Strength in numbers

Participants comment on the value of being within multicultural educational settings where they are not alone and therefore have 'strength in numbers'. Although the whiteness that underpins the entire education system is prevalent even within multicultural educational institutions, by 'being one of many', in very small ways, this weakens the barriers that come with the starkness of whiteness. This is displayed here by the confidence and self-esteem displayed by the participants. This is important to

recognise as, for Black women, their sense of confidence and self-esteem can often be undermined due to the "complex and subtle gendered, racialised, and classed exchanges occurring in schools," (Evans-Winters, 2016: 143) which rarely values or empowers their identities. Some of the reasons for this difference is that they were able to see themselves reflected in their experiences and also as they were able to mix with and form friendships with others like themselves in multicultural environments. Whereas, as is evidenced by 'being the only one in predominantly white educational institutions earlier, meant that some often wondered whether they belonged there.

In a report by Ajegbo et al (2007: 23) they argue that "all pupils are entitled to education for diversity and that their school experience should offer opportunities to explore, in the first instance, their own identities in relation to the local community," and this is what Kemi states that she was able to enjoy:

"[My primary school] was very diverse but I think that it opened my eyes up to the way the world is I suppose. At a young age I started to realise that we are all different and we all have different cultural backgrounds because I remember talking to someone in primary school, we were quite young and we were talking about things we eat at home and I was like "Rice and stew, it's amazing" and they were looking at me like "What are you on about? What's rice and stew?" And that's when I was like "Yeah you guys don't eat the same thing as me." So, it's like "Ok, what do you guys eat at home?" And the Filipinos would be like "Yeah we have noodles or we have a rice but it's not with your type of stew." Whereas, some of the white kids would be like "Yeah I have bangers and mash or fish and chips or I have a casserole or…." So, that's when I started to realise that "Oh wow!" We are all different people, but we are still the same at the same time." **(Kemi, 24, Nigerian-British)**

Through interactions with other pupils from many different cultural backgrounds, Kemi was able, through the discussion of food to "locate [herself] within

wider UK society, [be] comfortable in [her] own skin and alive to the individuality of the diverse people around [her],” (Ajegbo et al, 2007:23). Similarly, in a Danish primary school, Dinesen (2011) makes the case that ethnic and cultural diversity creates more trust between white and non-white Danish children which facilitates good relationships in later life. In 2014, Burgess also highlighted the success of London’s schools in terms of ethnic composition. Kemi also shows that there is room for all within the space of her primary school, regardless of one’s cultural background. This can create an inclusive and diverse environment where all pupils feel a sense of belonging, contributing to confidence and self-esteem. Interestingly from the previous excerpt, although all the pupils are British, their ethnicities and cultural identities play significant parts in how they understand themselves and others, represented by what and how they eat particular foods. This is also a reminder that ethnic minority “groups in Britain are marked by historical and cultural differences among one another, in addition to those that mark them as different within the host culture,” (Rasool, 1999:27). In the next extract, Deja recalls her unique predominantly Black private schooling experience that instilled confidence and high self-esteem in her which was almost reversed in her predominantly white secondary schooling:

“My primary school was a faith-based, Christian-focused and that’s where I learnt a lot of my Black history because it was a predominantly, if not 100% Black students at the school. It was good for a foundation because throughout my secondary school I never got to learn about my culture at school and that’s…I lacked interest in History, I only did it for Law, but I lacked interest because I never saw myself on the page. I was really happy that I got to experience this in primary school otherwise for 18 years, only being self-taught that and not experiencing it with other young people my age who are learning it at the same time. So learning about the great names, the people that made the biggest changes in our history, in my primary school was necessary just almost to prepare me to go into secondary school and be completely comfortable with who I am.

However, if I didn't get that experience, I could have lost my identity at secondary school, I think that could have happened," **(Deja, 23, Black British Caribbean)**

Commenting on what Deja identifies, Lane (2017: 15) explains that "because schools are microcosms of communities…societal disassociation with Black women is often revealed in schools through dehumanising pedagogies and curricula." Deja is able to compare her contrasting schooling experiences in this regard, as well as the consequences which she states as her lack of interest in particular subjects like History and almost losing her identity because of the invisibility she experienced in what she was learning during secondary school. Carter (2007: 52) contributes to this area about the importance of the curriculum when she investigates how Black young women unpack whiteness within their English Literature classes. She demonstrates within her study how her own participants "were constantly negotiating whiteness to survive…the term survive to capture the intellectual and mental struggles [they] had to endure as they believed that their identities were constantly challenged," or in the case of Deja, completely unacknowledged in her secondary schooling. It must be noted that Eurocentric curriculums are a feature in many educational institutions, regardless of student demographic. Both Fuller (1980) and Coultas (1989) point out that the Black girls within their educational research displayed pride and positive self-esteems based on their Black identities which also contributed to their motivations and aspirations. Following on from this, Oyserman et al (2001), Miller and MacIntosh (1999) and Butler-Barnes et al (2017) address the importance of positive racial socialisation which can go on to act as protective factors against racism as well as assisting in the resilience of Black children. Deja also demonstrates this through the socialisation she receives in her predominantly Black primary schooling that somewhat buffered her experiences in secondary school. The positive sense of self that Fuller and Coultas identify is

further exemplified by Dionne who talks about her friendship group in secondary school which is humorously named after an US Black hair brand:

"I had the "Dark and lovely" crew {laughs} that's what we called ourselves…I had a good friendship group as well, there was probably about 3 or 4 of us that were really close. I am always talking to everyone and get on with most people, but you have your selection of friends that you are- whatever break you do, you go together and stuff like that. But yeah the "Dark and lovely" crew was an interesting…{laughs} it was all girls and all dark-skinned girls, all Caribbean." **(Dionne, 34, Black Caribbean)**

The sense of pride that herself and her friends have about their identities as Black Caribbean "dark-skinned girls" illustrates how her close friendship group helped to affirm her identity. Such safe spaces for Black girl identity and development are significant because "in finding their space [they] create a community where they are central, important and highly visible and indeed often politicised," (Weekes, 2003: 50). Through these spaces, confidence and self-esteem can be maintained at high levels.

On the other hand, although being educated within more multicultural educational settings means that participants are not alone and are able to gain some comfort through 'strength in numbers', the merits of these interactions- with others like themselves do not necessarily have any powerful external impact precisely because the cultures, relationships and knowledge of people of colour are not transferable, recognised, legitimised or valued within white spaces (Yosso, 2005). Rather, as my participants' experiences show, they become positioned as "the unruly Black girl", as structural inequalities and historical legacies disadvantage the participants who attended these multicultural institutions.

The unruly Black girl

Based upon stereotypes of Black girls and women that often encompass 'the Strong Black woman' (West et al, 2016); 'the Superwoman' (Reynolds, 1997); 'the Angry Black woman' (Jones and Norwood, 2017) and 'the Loud Black Girl' (Fordham, 1993), participants are positioned by teachers within these contexts as unruly and delinquent as well as deserving of harsh disciplinary treatment in an effort to 'tame' them. This stereotyping reinforces teacher bias and one particular way that this manifests is by what Fergus (2017: 172) refers to as deficit-thinking, that is teachers "discount[ing] the presence of systemic inequalities as the result of race-based processes, practices, and policies…plac[ing] fault in a group for the conditions they find themselves experiencing". Furthermore, the positioning of Black girls and women are based on historical legacies where these stereotypes of 'controlling images' reflect "the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination," (Collins, 1990:71). This feeds into perceived notions about the 'ideal' student within educational contexts which is often "a young (white) man from an upper-class or middle-class background," (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003: 598). Regardless of the fact that there are more BAME students within these institutions, the perceptions of the 'ideal' student remain prevalent. In the following extract from Janaya, she brings to life how these stereotypes about Black girls and women were projected onto her and thus how she is positioned in her school and later on within the workplace:

"I feel like the whole detention thing and the whole like feistiness, a lot of my Black female friends have had that. I suppose when my teacher said you developed 'the

look,' I was like what does that mean? This was year 9 and it was genuinely because he said something which was to me quite out of order and I just went "What?" And I gave him 'the look,' but apparently, it's a very 'Black female look,' and I was like ok that's a little bit racist, but I'll let it be. But yeah, y'know what? I feel like we were learning about our identity in schools and what was acceptable and what wasn't acceptable, and I feel like that's a shared experience throughout. I feel like with hair you learn what's acceptable and what your employers in the future might think, because I feel like- I know things have changed a lot now- like at school it was natural hair, you could experiment, you could gel down the edges and once you got into the workplace, it was weave and then it was like you had to break out of that mould. Now even reconditioning the mind to think "Well I've got an interview on that day, should I wear braids or and afro?" It's that sort of thing and you learn that in school." **(Janaya, 22, Caribbean)**

When Janaya starts by talking about 'the whole detention thing', she suggests that she along with other Black girls are used to getting into trouble due to their perceived 'feistiness'. This is further reinforced by her teacher's remark that she has developed a 'very 'Black female look' which she gives as a response to something that has been said and where this 'look' is read as defiant due to his stereotypical perceptions of Black girls as a group. Janaya places this incident within a wider context where her experiences of being reprimanded for subjective, behavioural offences (Morris, 2007) in school are part of a bigger reality where she will and is "constantly being policed and punished for menial transgressions which are sometimes subjectively determined as problems," (Wun, 2018: 433). This extends to such details as how she feels able to wear her own hair (Greene, 2017; Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2018). Following on from this, Makeda opens up about a similar way that she encounters and observes Black girls being policed and positioned as unruly within educational contexts:

"Sometimes the way we speak or say things, they would say "Why are you being aggressive?" or when you are having- not even an argument- but you just don't agree, let's say you don't agree with the teacher or agree with a student, and then it just seems like you're causing disruption or people feel awkward or tense around you and they label you. It's like "Why you angry? What issues do you have today?" or "Something is going on at home" and stuff like that. That's one of the key ones especially being in school and I think especially for [Black] females, especially the whole angry thing- "Why are you so angry? Why are you shouting?" You're walking with your friends or "Why's your face…"- that 'bitch-resting' face? "Why do you look like that?" Why are you never smiling"? I think that's another thing we can relate to and then teachers and stuff would get worried." **(Makeda, 24, Black Caribbean)**

Mode of speech, walking with friends and facial expressions are not recognised formally as warranting discipline (Wun, 2018: 433). Yet, as Makeda reports, all too often, she feels that it is normal to be reprimanded over such things based upon how Black students are perceived by staff. In addition, the usual racist tropes and the labelling of Black girls as being 'angry', 'aggressive', 'loud' and 'disruptive' are once again evident in the way that Makeda establishes that she and other Black girl friends are positioned within her multicultural schooling experiences. Moreover, when Makeda touches upon "that bitch-resting" face, it corroborates with Janaya's supposedly ''very "Black female" look' which once again reinforces the idea of Black girls as naturally angrier and more aggressive than others. In the long run, the policing of Makeda, her friends and other Black girls in terms of how they should act, speak and their facial expressions are, in effect encouraging "Black girls [to] deny who they are and adopt the characteristics of the majority culture..[but] this logic is problematic in that it teaches Black girls that in order to be successful, they cannot be who they are organically," (Ricks, 2014: 14). These incidences can also be explained further by Butler's (1988, 1990, 1993) concept of 'performativity' which she specifically uses to

define gender as a discursive construct that “is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self,” (Butler, 1988: 519). She further states that these performances are “a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief,” (Butler, 1988: 520). The teachers in both Janaya and Makeda’s cases have come to view, read and place them (and their other Black female friends) in “the unruly Black girl” category and therefore deserving of harsher discipline or intervention. Moreover, it seems that regardless of how the Black girls behave, the “unruly Black girl” becomes ““the script”…already determined within this regulatory frame, and the subject has a limited number of “costumes” from which to make a constrained choice of gender style,” (Salih, 2002: 55). This is illustrated when Makeda expresses the limited “costumes” she feels all Black students, but especially Black girls have which is: aggressive, disruptive and angry. Scholars (Tate, 2005, 2014; Chadderton, 2013 and Clammer, 2015) meaningfully extend Butler’s concept to foreground race. Moreover, it highlights an understanding of Black culturally expected behaviours and ways of being including non-verbal cues and how similar behaviours expressed by white students are treated differently by schools for example, being outspoken is viewed as confidence when expressed by white students but as bad and challenging school authority when displayed by Black students. Historically from slavery and colonization, Black people have been expected to accept white authority and not to challenge it, and if they do, they have to be broken in which the participant narratives attest to.

It is important to bear in mind that these positions were largely based upon external factors, mainly teachers' perceptions and treatment and this emphasises the significant role that they operate as social agents within educational fields and in the reproduction of stereotypes and consequently inequality and disadvantage in the experiences of Black girls and women.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has critically elucidated and illustrated the ways in which different barriers are negotiated in order for the Black British women graduates to navigate within different types of educational institutions throughout their educational journeys. Focusing on two kinds of educational trajectories in which the first was catergorised as 'being the only one', I critically explored the experiences of the Black women graduates through the lens of their experiences of having been educated within predominantly white institutions. I evidenced that accessibility options were very limited when entering these types of institutions and that once participants had successfully entered into them, they had to navigate the barrier of whiteness and their positions as "outsiders within".

Within the second trajectory I contrasted and compared the experiences of: 'being one of many', demonstrating the constructed experiences of the Black women graduates who have studied within institutions where there are higher rates of BAME pupils and students. In terms of accessibility, issues became most apparent in terms of the academic support given to students there compared to predominantly white educational institutions. It also exemplified that even though it can be said that

participants had ‘strength in numbers’ as they were not alone within multicultural institutions, the merits of this are limited especially when structural disadvantages are still operating. Furthermore, they faced barriers like unfair and harsher disciplinary procedures due to being positioned as “the unruly Black girl” within these spaces.

Such detailed exploration as well as the different barriers faced by participants within the education system and specifically within different types of educational institutions are necessary to critically explore. This is because these barriers create significant impact at every stage of their educational experiences and journeys by way of “individual and institutional racism, and material inequalities,” (Hamilton, 2018: 15). This chapter has revealed some of these inequalities and how they operate in the education system which undoubtedly hinders and restricts the progression of Black British girls and young women. Morrison (1975) describes these barriers as "distraction[s] [that] keeps you from doing your work” and if Black girls and young women have to constantly battle against these barriers, it will inevitably affect their efforts in gaining the necessary educational qualifications that are so needed for them to compete within highly-stratified and unequal societies. However, the Black British women within this study are willing and have already transcended these hindrances in many ways. The next chapter builds upon the ways that the participants have aspired and been motivated to pursue and succeed in the education system, despite the barriers, by way of the strategies they devise.

CHAPTER 7: "I KNEW I DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO MESS ABOUT"- THE PURSUIT OF EDUCATION AS OBLIGATION, STRUGGLE AND BECOMING/SUCCESS

Introduction

According to Givens (2016: 1288), education "has played a tool of white supremacist colonial commandment on the one hand, and…a liberatory Diasporic practice on the other." This has previously been highlighted by hooks (1994:4) who also differentiates between two types of education: "education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination." For many historically oppressed groups such as Black women, the notion of education as a liberating tool is shared and signified through the earned qualifications alongside the subsequent access it is *supposed* to provide to further opportunities, financial gains and more stable positions within society (Fordham, 1996; Smith and Middleton, 2007). In addition, being from a historically oppressed group *and* educated does not only supply individual benefits, but it generally also engenders pride and is regarded as a huge accomplishment amongst one's family and wider community. This is because, as Mirza (2006a:152-153) posits:

> "the struggle for humanity, as the Black and Asian community know is fundamentally linked to the struggle for education. For a Black person to be educated is to become human…education…is not about the process of learning or teaching it is about refutation."

In this sense, education is regarded as a life source in which Black women view as an obligation to obtain, precisely because of the significant and political role it has

played in former times as well as in present day. In some ways then, education- at least in its institutionalised form, can be viewed as a double-edged-sword, in that:

> "The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility, in that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of the mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress," (hooks, 1994: 207).

This chapter firstly examines the importance of education for the Black women graduates in terms of the obligations they feel to themselves, their families and their wider communities. Secondly, it considers the kinds of personal struggles and challenges that they encounter along the way. Thirdly, it demonstrates the types of strategies developed individually and collectively, emphasisng their commitment to education. To conclude, this chapter will critique educational 'success' to argue that it is narrowly defined and operates in very different ways for the participants.

Obligations to self, families and wider communities

The importance of education for all has been embedded within Black communities for a long time. Furthermore, the importance of educating women is asserted by Dr Aggrey[103] who proclaimed that "if you educate a man you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family," or a nation (Jacobs, 1996: 47). In the work of Collins (1990: 149), she follows this notion when

[103] referred to as the "Father of African Education" (Jacobs, 1996)

she writes about how in the past, “educated Black women traditionally were brought up to see their education as something gained not just for their own development but for the purpose of race uplift.” Although Collins is writing in the context of Black American activism, it resonates with the pursuit of education as both an individual and a collective obligation for many Black women across the globe. This is due, in part, to their delayed participation within the white educational field because of prolonged periods of exclusion, and then entrance into inadequate and/or unequal spaces once they were permitted[104]. In this way then, to learn, to be able to use one’s mind and to be educated is as hooks (1994: 2) recalls, “a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonisation.[105]”

Self

During interviews, similar sentiments of obligations to self were conveyed by participants:

“I feel like there is just more of a hunger in us as Black women to just…like I said to have that security and that backup, because it really is a backup. It’s not just like “Oh it’s nice to have this degree,” it can actually save you kinda thing. This is the thing that’s gonna…if they don’t wanna give you a job, they can’t say that “Oh it’s because you don’t have…”. You’ve got that. Do you know what I mean? And I think we were all very aware of that, so we stuck it down a bit more.” **(Simone, 21, Caribbean British)**

[104] See Bryan et al (1985); Gaitskell (1988); McCluskey (1989); Arao (2016)
[105] It must be noted that some cultures/communities/creeds do not see educating girls and women as good e.g. Boko Haram in Nigeria

Simone talks about the importance of educational qualifications for Black women as a group in terms of its value as a vital capital- borrowing from Bourdieu (1986) - that she feels is a necessity as "it can actually save you". In particular, education for Simone is essential, through the acquisition of qualifications, as it supplies her with "security" and a "backup" that will prove her capabilities to anyone who may try to question them (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Mirza, 1992; 1997). Therefore, she feels an obligation to acquire her degree expressing that it manifests as a "hunger" within educational journeys. Likewise, when researching young Black women in a London comprehensive school in the 1970s, Fuller (1982: 92) shares that she too found that "the high value they placed on education and educational qualifications…[was] a necessary preparation for work…consciously related to their knowledge of high local and national employment and the distinct possibility that they would encounter sexual and racial discrimination…[therefore it was] likely to be part of their attempts to side-step discrimination." Based upon Simone's account, it seems that little has changed in the way that gaining educational qualifications are viewed by Black British women since the 1970s. In the following quote, La'Shay discusses the high value placed on performing well educationally and the obligation she feels to do so, which becomes personally attached to her own self-worth and value:

"I believed this notion that education was the most important thing and literally that is what I had attached my confidence to. So, if I am not performing educationally, then I am nothing literally and I believed that. Who you are is not determined by your education, there are so many of us [Black girls] that attach our confidence and who we are to our educational achievements. It's not our fault- we were raised that way."
(La'Shay, 26, Black British Jamaican)

La'Shay discusses how she believed that education is "the most important thing" and therefore, this belief resonates to what has been defined as academic contingencies of self-worth where performing well educationally determines one's sense of self-worth (Crocker and Wolfe, 2001; Crocker et al, 2002; Crocker et al, 2003a; Crocker et al 2003b; Kaplan and Hanoch, 2010; Liao & Wei, 2014; Blakenship and Stewart, 2017; Lawrence and Smith, 2017). These contingencies of self-worth "develop over the course of time in response to many forms of socialisation and social influence…from parent-child interactions…to cultural norms and values…to observational learning," (Crocker and Wolfe, 2001: 595). It can be interpreted that the obligation to do well educationally is evidenced by La'Shay who equates her self-worth and value to her educational performance, which she was socialised to do when she states that "it's not our fault- we were raised that way." In some ways, La'Shay's relationship with education are situated within a collective understanding about how important gaining education is within a world where, like Simone said, the gaining of educational qualifications is perceived to be able to "save you" in situations that call into question your value.

Families

In the following excerpts shared by Beverley, Jumoke and Afua, it is evident that the pursuit of education is closely associated with both the awareness of inequality and an obligation to their families:

"You don't want to embarrass your parents so you must do well. We all knew where we wanted to be and at that time, we thought education was our way of getting there.

That's all we knew as well…[it] was "Education, education," and to use that to our advantage. I think a lot of the time some people may have been told, "This is an opportunity for you in life"." **(Beverley, 24, Nigerian and Black)**

"We take education, I wouldn't even say more seriously but there is a lot more meaning behind us pursuing- especially higher education- so it's not just about...When you go to school, you are thinking of your parents and what your parents have done to get you there whereas, the white…- well the white people can have the same views, but it's just a lot more deep for us. A lot of our parents have suffered, and we have seen that suffering and we don't want the same for ourselves. So, maybe not so much primary school but definitely secondary school, university- I knew that I didn't have time to mess about." **(Jumoke, 23, Black British of Nigerian heritage)**

"I feel like I was born to go to university, from the womb African parents tell you {Ghanaian accent} "You need to go to university! We wasn't [sic] able to go." Even looking at my parents as well, the fact that they just did secondary education, I'm like "No- this is for you!" It's for myself, but it's for you! "This is your degree, this is - "Like "Here, here's your degree, here's your Masters, here's your this, here's your that"." **(Afua, 24, Ghanaian)**

Beverley shares that she doesn't want to "embarrass" her parents by not doing well educationally and that she too, like La'Shay has been socialised to regard education as very important. Moreover, Jumoke supports the view that education is very important by justifying that there is "a lot more meaning behind us pursuing" it precisely because of the "suffering" experienced by parents. Therefore, the obligation Jumoke feels to do well and stay focused is seen as one way to repay her parents. For Afua, the fact that her parents were not able to have the same educational opportunities as she has is the reason why she feels obliged to not only do well, but to share her educational achievements with them. Evans (1988: 185) also comments on the costs of the pursuit of education explaining that "the prize of a good education

[is often] attained at the cost of great sacrifice on the part of one's parents, sometimes the entire family." In the case of the participants, the sacrifices made by grandparents and parents include migration from other countries in hopes of better opportunities for themselves and their children, as well as providing support to assist with participants' educational achievements. In this way, the pursuit of education is once again highlighted as an obligation to families and as a way for Black women to use their educational qualifications to overcome barriers they and their families may encounter in the future.

The wider community

There has been previous research that emphasises the centrality of education for particular BAME communities in Britain (Modood, 2004; Shah et al, 2010; Francis and Archer, 2005; Demie and McLean, 2007, Rollock et al, 2015). This situates the pursuit of education and the acquisition of educational qualifications as an obligation to wider communities. In this respect, it incorporates ethnicity and cultural backgrounds as key motivating factors because, "ethnicity seems to cut across class, possibly in some ways because ethnicity can mean resources," (Modood, 2004: 93). This lens also shows differences within the category of 'Black' in relation to diverse experiences beyond the education system that filters into it. One's ethnicity and cultural background can be seen as habitus due to how it manifests in an "embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history- [it] is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product," (Bourdieu, 1990: 56). These perceptions were very prominent within many interviews like the accounts of Ebony and Kemi:

"Jamaican culture's very much like…Jamaicans don't give up and they're boasy [excessively proud] bad! Like if we are gonna do it, we are gonna do it good. So, it's just like, that has very much been a driving point of like…Remember where you came from. Just listening to my nan's struggle, she left school at 12, she left 4 kids behind in Jamaica to bring us to England. It's very much like…maybe that's another pressure that was like…we can't afford to lose. So, it was a pressure in a sense of we also can't afford to lose because it's just like you've gotta push yourself forward." **(Ebony, 25, British with Jamaican and Guyanese heritage)**

Ebony talks about herself and her pursuit of education in the context of her Jamaican ethnicity and culture which for her includes instilling pride, along with her nan's migration and sacrifice which all result in the high stakes and obligations to her pursuit of education. Within her research about the diasporic identities of young British Caribbean people, Reynolds (2006: 1095) discovers a similar occurrence when she shares that "young people's familial and cultural connections to their Caribbean country of origin often supersede their place of birth or residence in understanding and defining their ethnic identity." Interestingly, Ebony is able to draw on her Jamaican culture to employ as a resource to encourage her in developing her self-belief. What's more, Kemi locates her own pursuit for education in Nigerian culture:

"*I feel like I can't speak for other African countries, but Nigeria, I definitely know that families value education. They treat it like gold, they are always tryna…Like a lot of my family, some of them live in Nigeria but they want their children to come here for uni or A-levels cos they value the education and they understand that it's kinda a gateway to other sections of life. So, it's definitely that- and some of my mum's siblings- well they all went to uni, but there were people in my family who did not necessarily get an education because of different reasons. So, they understand the struggle that they had to go through and why they try and tell us, "Look you have to go to uni!" Cos they have been through it [struggle] and they don't want us to go*

through it. So, it was definitely like two things that Nigerians take very seriously: church and education. I don't underestimate that at all, they are the two things and secondary to that is family and everything else. But if you have God and you have education, it's like I can conquer the world really. So, definitely being Nigerian has definitely influenced that a lot and it's just like, be the best person you can be and don't make the mistakes of the previous generation or the generation before that." **(Kemi, 24, Nigerian-British)**

According to Kemi, education is regarded to be as valuable as gold for Nigerians, second only to God. Demie and McLean (2007) uncover comparable insights in their paper about African heritage British students finding that many of the families in the study valued education, attended church regularly, remembered the reality of poverty in Africa and the parents were active in supporting their children to ensure educational achievement. This is further illustrated by Kemi when she talks about education as a necessity to enable a "gateway to other sections of life" and as a way to avoid "struggle." Therefore, this may be why it is integral to her as a resource that she has been socialised to strive for and encouraged to pursue. In fact, it is becoming noticeable that African heritage students outperform their Caribbean peers (Haughton, 2013), and other research indicates that the Nigerian diaspora in the US are one of the most educated groups (Fosco, 2018; Mujakachi, 2019). Interestingly, in spite of the high value placed on education, which can be instilled by cultural background and ethnicity, in many cases, these aspirations are not regarded in the same way that white middle-class cultures and aspirations are. Yosso (2005: 76) offers the explanation that "cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, but rather it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are *valued* by privileged groups in society," [emphasis in original]. In this

way, both Ebony and Kemi illustrate an obligation to do well educationally, not only to their families but to their wider (Jamaican and Nigerian) communities.

As Dumas (2014: 21) posits, "in education, the black *we* becomes particularly important in asserting black humanity – that is, in insisting on the intellectual and creative abilities of black people, and in demanding rights to educational resources," [emphasis in original]. Additionally, Mirza (1997: 270) has already termed the pursuit of education for Black women as "evidence of collective educational urgency" and she suggests that something much bigger is occurring where "the extent, direction and intensity of the black female positive orientation to education is significant enough to qualify their collective action as a transformative social movement," (ibid: 272). The findings from this study support both Dumas and Mirza's claims but also brings forth the different obligations that contribute to these motivations and aspirations demonstrated by the participants. The Black British women graduates indicate the ways in which there is "a lot more meaning behind us pursuing," it (Jumoke) due to the obligations they feel to themselves, their families and wider communities. Moreover, a prominent tenet of Critical Race Theory is the centring of participants' voices in their experiences, achieved in this study by the narratives shared of the obligations of the Black women graduates. Furthermore, findings from Mirza (2008:16), suggest that the Black young women she studied had "a fundamental belief…that no matter who you are, if you work hard and do well at school, you will be rewarded in the world of work." The participants in this study do not all subscribe to meritocratic ideologies because they display a strong sense of awareness of the inequalities that structure society. In this way, the high value placed on gaining qualifications is seen as a way to overcome the discrimination they will inevitably face. However, whether participants are able to fully enjoy supposed benefits will be

critiqued later in this chapter. Another reason for the high value placed on education and motivations are what Carter (2008) puts forward through the notion of 'achievement as resistance' when looking at high achieving Black American students. This is similar to how Simone, La'Shay, Beverley, Jumoke, Afua, Ebony and Kemi articulate the different obligations to their pursuit of education. Like the students in Carter's study, the participants in this study view "achievement as a means to an end, considering what it means to achieve as a *black* person," [emphasis in original] (Carter: 2008: 471). This is regardless of their various social class, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds. Having considered and discussed the different obligations influencing the aspirations and motivations behind the pursuit of education for the participants, attention turns to exploring the kinds of challenges that they encounter.

The education system as a site of personal struggle

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:17-18), struggle is an integral feature within any given field as it is a "socially structured space in which agents struggle, depending on the position they occupy in that space, either to change or preserve the boundaries and form." Within the field of education this struggle persists as agents, individually and collectively, compete to secure capitals for themselves and their offspring to gain or maintain advantages which can be transferred into benefits in the given field and others (Harker, 1990; Nash; 1990). However, as people enter into the field with varying types of habitus and capitals, this means that "each agent has to reckon, at all times, with the fiduciary value set on him (sic), which defines what he is entitled to- among other things, the (hierarchized) goods he may appropriate or

the strategies he can adopt, which, to have a chance of being recognised, that is symbolically effective, have to be pitched at the right level, neither too high or too low," (Bourdieu, 1990: 138)[106]. By way of this Bourdieusian lens, it becomes apparent that while some groups are able to navigate with ease throughout the education system, other groups find it challenging and encounter particular struggles. This is because the education system "puts into practice an implicit pedagogic action, requiring initial familiarity with the dominant culture, and which proceeds by imperceptible familiarisation, offers information and training which can be received only by subjects endowed with the system of predispositions that is the condition for success of the transmission and the inculcation of the culture," (Bourdieu, 1977: 494). Therefore, family upbringing and support are crucial in equipping individuals to compete in the education field and their input will be considered later on in this chapter. Yet, as stated by Mirza (1997: 269), Black women "appear to strive for inclusivity…[but] they are out of place, disrupting, untidy. They do not fit. The notion of their agency and difference is problematic for the limited essentialist and mechanical social reproduction theories that dominate our explanations of black female inequality." Within interviews, participants disclosed some of the personal struggles they faced along their educational journeys along with feeling that they did not belong:

"[There are] certain lessons I believe a Black child is taught at home that they then carry with them into school. So having the lesson instilled in you that you have to work twice as hard to get half as far, I've heard that from a very young age. I'm not saying that I felt disadvantaged as such, but I knew that I had to put in extra just to…Cos I knew that even if I accepted it, there are still so many people out there who see me as Black first rather than seeing any value I have." **(Deja, 23, Black British Caribbean)**

[106] Although Bourdieu is referring to men, his assertion is applicable within this context about Black British women graduates

Before entering into the education field, Deja is already socialised to understand that being Black may hinder her full acceptance and the way she is able to navigate within it. She is led to believe that she has to work harder as her Blackness may be viewed by others as deficient and inferior and she may be treated as such. Miller and MacIntosh (1999) argue that socialising Black children to be aware of their racial identities can both protect and enable resilience in their educational experiences. They define racial socialisation as "a 'suit of armour" against hostilities of the environment' which are "direct and indirect, verbal and nonverbal, overt and covert…[where] the critical messages remain the same, a child's race will affect life chances and options, and he or she must develop skills to navigate the hostile environment," (Miller and MacIntosh: 1999: 161). This is confirmed by Deja when she notes that being aware of her racial identity did not make her feel disadvantaged instead, it made her more vigilant and prepared to put in more effort as a requirement to succeed. Linking back to previous assertions made by Ebony about Jamaican culture, La'Shay articulates this in more detail in relation to the tension she feels between her cultural identity and the education system:

"I think Jamaican culture has this legacy of challenging the system, I just think of Marcus Garvey and Rastafarianism and it's very much like {Jamaican accent} "Bun Babylon and me nah waan!" Do you know what I mean? And I think there's that spirit of rebellion that makes- or in my opinion- made me very aware of what systems were at play and also gave me an understanding that not everything in Britain is for me. Even though uni was encouraged, I was already- whenever I enrolled- was thinking about middle-class white values and colonialism- these were things that I'd learnt from before- and race and how that might play into things. Just having that awareness was almost like when you're…I think what's it, double consciousness from W.E.B. Du Bois, so it was already having an experience but being an observer myself. I think that kinda made it harder for me cos whether it was true or not, I still had a perception that maybe

there was some people in this institution that would rather not have me be here and maybe would rather that I did fail." **(La'Shay, 26, Black British Jamaican)**

By way of her interpretation of Jamaican culture's "legacy of challenging the system" and "spirit of rebellion," La'Shay illustrates the way "a field consists of a set of objectives, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations "deposited" within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action," (Bourdieu and Wacquant:1992: 16). Based on this, La'Shay embodies Jamaican culture in her habitus and her presence within the education field as well as her awareness of the power dynamics in which middle-class whiteness dominates. Therefore, through previous racial and cultural socialisation she has been able to "create spheres of influence that are separate from but engaged with existing structures of oppression," (Mirza, 1997: 276). Within a study about how Caribbean young women negotiate their racialised and gendered identities within education (Phoenix, 2009), the notion of education as a site of struggle is carried forward by Pratt (1991:6) who writes that classrooms become "contact zones" as well as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today." Moreover, in a similar way that Deja's racial socialisation made her more vigilant, resilient and prepared to put in extra effort, La'Shay's cultural as well as racial identity instils her with an understanding that she too may not gain full acceptance in the field. Through her reference to W.E.B Du Bois's (1989) double consciousness[107], La'Shay is also calling out the internal

[107] to express the internal conflict felt by African-Americans whose Black and American identities are incompatible with each other because they represent "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder," (Du Bois, 1989:6).

contradictions and the struggles she encounters as a British *and* Jamaican young woman venturing through an education system which she feels does not and will not truly accept her. Yet, she still pursues education as a means to an end. Additionally, this resistance invoked by Jamaican culture carried forward by La'Shay demonstrates the usefulness of Bourdieu's theories which ultimately "exposes White, middle class culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of 'culture' are judged in comparison to this 'norm'," (Yosso, 2005: 76).

The curriculum

In the following extract, Shakirah shares the struggles she encounters when bringing her own identity and history into her university work:

"My final year project was about Black British History particularly in the West Midlands, and I looked at the riots that took place in the West Midlands and the South East in the 1980s so, my whole third year…[it] was a very political subject, a subject that was quite close to my heart. And again, like I told you, there were no Black tutors or anything, so I didn't feel there was anyone who could understand. Like I really do think they missed completely what I was talking about and it's very difficult to feel like you are being misunderstood and not being appreciated. There are no exams, so they judge you all on coursework so it's very much the interpretation of the person who is actually looking at the work. So, I do feel like they missed the mark and it was horrible as a creative person to just not be appreciated and understood and that was my whole experience at university basically- not understood." **(Shakirah, 23, British Jamaican)**

The previous account describes the ways in which particular forms of culture and knowledge are privileged and valued throughout the education system resulting

in those, like Shakirah, with alternative ones feeling "misunderstood and not being appreciated." It also puts students at risk of teacher disapproval if they do decide to include those forms of culture and knowledge within their own work. In this way, the curriculum within the education field can be seen to uphold this. Bourdieu attributes this to the dominance of middle- and upper-class groups who "struggle to impose the definition of the world that is most congruent with their particular interests," (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 14). However, such disapproval has real consequences and can result in being given low grades which can restrict educational achievement. However, when race is considered, it becomes apparent that "the power of Whiteness is ideologically reproduced and legitimated in the contemporary educational market by the dominance of an ethnocentric curriculum," (Hamilton, 2018: 3). These struggles are consistent occurrences faced by the Black women in this study regarding the curriculum[108] and are further exemplified by both Halima and Sophia:

"[Going through university] opened my eyes so… it opened my eyes to quite a lot of things in a sense that…like how white the curriculum is. For example…- and also you don't fit in within that institution or you only fit in a certain way. So, for example W.E.B. Du Bois, he for example is such a big figure in sociology but we only did like maybe two 5 minutes on it. For me that's kinda like "ok…?" And the thing is, he had so much to say about so many things other than certain things and they only focus on race or gender and stuff. I felt that was quite like, not discouraging, but it was really disappointing cos as a BME student, you are like "ahh ok, let me learn about this person" cos even you can implement these kinda things in your essays. They [the university] are supposed to inspire something…there is not just great white people or it's not just that all white people are great and there is only this 1 Black guy or 1 Black woman or this 1 Asian woman that did something amazing! Like you are making whiteness the norm. For example, when we talked about traditional, it is equated with

[108] It must be noted that there are ongoing initiatives in this domain to address the state of the curriculum (Arday and Mirza, 2018).

whiteness, you are making a norm out of something that is not a norm if that makes sense." **(Halima, 21, Black African)**

"The education system finds it…is comfortable enough to teach me about slavery- within the educational system, you are taught about the continent of Africa being poverty stricken, full of conflict, full of rape, all these negative connotations are linked to Africa. In a way you get to a point where you think "Is Africa a continent or is it a country?" Because you group the entire continent as one and you don't differentiate the different parts of the continent that has different histories and different experiences. I think the way in which education- the curriculum is shaped, it's biased and it's extremely Eurocentric. As a society you can see how the demographics have changed in major cities in particular, it's a lot more multicultural. The education system should reflect that because it's just- in terms of intellectual curiosity- when you see someone that looks different to you, you wanna know more about them, and as the demographics change, you should instil that within the system. No one believes it if you tell anyone now, "Do you know Black people did this?" "No we didn't!" And it's because it has been omitted from the history books, so now it's just like I don't know. For decades and centuries you've been told this, people are told Black people are like this, they are the help basically, they need help, they need to be helped, they can't achieve without the help of a white man or white people and then now we're told "Oh no, by the way, what you've been told is not really the truth. Do you know this person invented this and they did that?" It's hard to believe and it's because you've omitted it for so long! The truth actually is coming out or if you do choose to explore more and you learn more about Black people it's just like "What?" You are confused and that's how they left it, and I just feel it needs to change." **(Sophia, 25, Black British)**

According to Halima, her university experiences were challenging because of how white the curriculum was and therefore she was unable to see herself or much diversity within the content. She stresses how for instance; Black scholars were only inserted on very few occasions within her sociology modules and only as an authority in topics about race or gender which does not enable an understanding about the other

contributions they made to the entire field. In this way, she is evidencing what Swartz (1992) has referred to as the curriculum being a 'master script' and how these other non-white voices and contributions are brought under control purposely. Halima argues that this erasure of diversity or the selection of very few scholars of colour for specific topics maintains the idea that it is only white people that have made significant contributions worth studying. But she is able to assert that this whiteness is not a true reflection of reality and is frustrated that this is what is constantly reproduced.

Sophia also voices a similar frustration with the manner in which Black people are portrayed and included within the curriculum through slavery and negative portrayals of Africa- which she argues is stripped of its heterogeneity as a continent, conflated instead into one big country. Additionally, she expresses how the curriculum needs to be updated to not only reflect the multiculturalism of certain English cities, but to teach everyone the truth. Sophia also alludes that one of the consequences of this Eurocentric and established curriculum is that it is internalised by Black people who become confused about the significant achievements and contributions of their communities and ancestors when they are told other narratives. As Critical Race Theorists argue, this is a deliberate act in which the curriculum is used to "disempower through misrepresentation" (Swartz, 1992: 34). To this effect, La'Shay, Shakirah, Halima and Sophia demonstrate their awareness of the dominant white, middle-class, culture entrenched within the education system and the knowledge that is privileged which they find challenging within their experiences.

Internalised pressure and mental health

Mirza (2008: 123) posits that because Black women embody 'difference' with their intersectional identities, this creates costs of simply 'just being' in higher education, or in the case of my research, the entire English education system. These costs are highlighted below in that some of the participants struggle by internalising these costs and pressures that being Black women within the educational field presents:

"I think with a lot of young Black women, we feel we have to be exceptional; we have to be magic because if we're not all these things, we're not good enough- do you get what I mean? It's ok…even though I scream 'Black excellence' with vim, it's ok to be 'Black mediocre', 'Black ok.' It's just ok to be ok, you don't have to be the be-all and end-all. You don't have to be first. I feel like Black girls have had- especially nowadays with social media and stuff like that- we have a lot more to contend with. I feel like our image is policed, I think we are doing a lot better than Black boys completely, but I do think our mental health takes more of a tarnish simply because we have to be able to…So, even say- I know this has nothing to do with education- but in my house now, my brother can eat, and my Grandma will be like "wash the plate" and it's like does he not have hands? Even in that sense [Black] girls are expected to do it all and be able to look after the kitchen and go to uni. I think with a lot of Black British girls, the expectation is to be flawless, if the boy does well it's just like 'he's a good boy' etc. But, if the girl does well it's expected, does that make sense? So more pressure." **(Ebony, 25, British with Jamaican and Guyanese heritage)**

Ebony foregrounds the personal struggles that many Black women encounter due to feeling that they have to be the best, which is exacerbated by social media, impacts upon mental health as well as how these struggles are unique to Black women whose multiple disadvantaged identities manifest differently to Black boys. In an article

by Byng (2017)[109] she interviews four successful Black women about an entrenched issue that is rarely spoken about. In a similar way that Ebony articulates the pressures felt by herself and other Black women to be exceptional and excellent, Byng writes that "the need to succeed is a natural human desire, yet for Black women, our success is beyond simple bragging rights or a pat on the back. Our success represents something bigger than our own personal victory. This concept can serve as a motivator, but it also presents an added pressure. Often when presented with a major opportunity we feel we can't afford to fail." This internalised pressure to succeed links back to the obligations imbued within the pursuit of education for Black women as stated in the previous section, along with the high stakes associated with educational success such as to uplift the entire race (Collins, 1990: 149). Terhune (2008: 549) makes sense of this by writing that "the pressure Black women place on themselves to achieve at inordinate levels is the manifestation of Black women fighting against the negative message of inferiority." Yet, Ebony highlights the personal struggles she faces living up to the high expectations placed on many Black women and the perceived status and liberatory tool (hooks, 1994; Givens, 2016) that is meant to be gained from gaining educational qualifications. Ebony expresses the unfair gendered nature of the pressures she encounters beyond the classroom and this resonates with a report by the Institute for Public Policy (IPPR) (2013) which explores gender equality. Within the report, it notes that in spite of years of Feminist activism, responsibility and household chores still fall disproportionally on women[110]. For Camille, this internalised pressure is experienced through having to constantly prove herself throughout the

[109] Aptly titled 'Failure Is Not An Option: The Pressure Black Women Feel To Succeed'
[110] Unfortunately, the report doesn't focus on the variations in the household experiences between women and men by ethnicity see Carby (1997); Doward (2016); Kan and Laurie (2016)

education system, as well as to her family and herself in order to fit into this inherent notion held by and for many Black women that they cannot fail:

"I feel like trying to prove yourself all the time is draining cos you see other people that don't have to do as much, and they seem to get by. I think it's- it can be really kind of damaging at times if things don't work out. Especially if there are expectations in your family or for yourself or if you see maybe another Black female that are doing really well, and you are expected to be like that. Maybe in class maybe another Black student in class that is at the top of the class or whatever and your family want this for you, there's always something and it's a lot." **(Camille, 21, African-Angolan)**

Camille discusses her experiences of having to constantly prove herself and how "draining" and "damaging" this can be if "things don't work out". This also suggests the obligations she feels to herself and family. According to Blankenship and Stewart (2017: 110), measuring one's self-worth according to academic contingencies of success are in effect a manifestation of 'proving yourself' as Camille puts it, because "holding two minority identities may increase forms of subordination and expose individuals not only to multiple forms of discrimination, but also unique ones." Therefore, gaining educational qualifications is regarded as a way to overcome these. Below, La'Shay echoes prevailing internalised pressures she too struggles with:

"*I think same thing again, that pressure that we can't- there was just no room for us not to be achievers, cos we had got so far against whatever obstacles. It was like there is no room for failure here- which is good in moderation, but when that's- it's the whole, it's who I am, the confidence thing. It just cripples us because it was that whole part of my self-identity and I think that's a lot of the case for all the [Black] girls that I met. Because I was talking about it with my friend the other day, I mean a lot of us- obviously this is not everyone's story- but a lot of us, if you grew up like the ugly duckling, then being clever was your thing, do you know what I mean? If you weren't pretty, the boys weren't following you, but you were smart so, you know that was our thing. So, it was*

like "Yeah we're smart though so it's all right." Then later you are like "Ok I don't look bad now." But then you still have that accolade. But then my mum would say {Jamaican accent} "You can pretty some more, but if there ain't nothing inna your 'ead!" Do you know what I mean? And I remember those sayings, education was what was the most important. I think, especially for [Black girls] that just got through to us so much clearer as well."" **(La'Shay, 26, Black British Jamaican)**

La'Shay reveals that many Black women do not feel like they have any other options but to work hard to keep overcoming obstacles in the education system. She also demonstrates how educational resilience and success are part of her self-identity and her habitus which Dumais (2002: 46) explains "influences the actions that one takes…generated by one's place in the social structure; by internalising the social structure and one's place in it, one comes to determine what is possible and what is not possible for one's life and develops aspirations and practices accordingly." As mentioned previously, in the education field there are constant struggles that take place between agents in which dominant groups are able to navigate easier due to sharing similar habitus and possessing the right capital for the field. La'Shay shows that although she is not part of the dominant group, she too is able, through her habitus, to survive within the field even though, as she notes, it is a struggle made harder because of the high stakes attached to it and the nature of the white, middle-class (and sometimes) male education field. Bourdieu (1996: 21) explains this as "*a particular mode of acquisition:* what we call ease is the privilege of those who, having imperceptibly acquired their culture through a gradual familiarisation in the bosom of the family, have academic culture as their native culture and can maintain a familiar rapport with it that implies the unconsciousness of its acquisition," [emphasis in original]. Yet, as illustrated previously in chapter 6, little changes for Black women from middle-class backgrounds who possess similar cultural capital and habitus to the field.

Moreover, La'Shay discusses the gendered dimension to the pursuit of education which she suggests can supplement lack of looks. By mentioning what her mother says, it illustrates Chavous and Cogburn's (2007: 30) observations that Black parents raise their children differently where "both girls and boys are socialised to be aware of potential racial barriers, but girls' socialisation is accompanied by messages that instil a sense of personal pride and confidence that allows them to be academically resilient in the face of barriers". However, La'Shay notes that the constant equation of one's value with academic achievement and continuous resilience can be crippling. This leads onto matters of mental health and wellbeing among Black women within education. In interviews, a few of the participants shared that they had struggled this- especially at university level:

"I went through a lot in uni, first year to third year I had counselling the whole three years and no one knows, not a lot of people know that. A lot of people think I am strong, but uni nearly broke me. Not only did the education…Just striving to be successful- it was like you've gotta do this…Your friends are smart…It was the pressure of it and…cos Black people are like "We don't have mental health issues," so there's always a stigma with it. So I was like I need to talk to someone and I didn't really want to talk to my mum cos I knew she would worry, and I didn't want to talk to my dad cos I knew he would worry and they're not there so what could they do? They'd just be worrying and it's like I didn't really wanna put them through that, so it was hard. But at the same time, looking back on it, it taught me a lot about myself, it taught me…it made me stronger…The counselling definitely helped, it definitely helped. It made me realise a lot about my personality as well and the way I deal with things. But that's one thing I am grateful for from my uni, [for] having a free counselling service giving the people the opportunity to go there confidentially and not being scared and it wasn't in the middle of campus where you would be seen and everyone knows you are going into the counselling building. It was more like discreet and I appreciated that. Uni was fun but difficult." **(Kemi, 24, Nigerian-British)**

Kemi was one of the few Black women in this study who was able to access consistent support for her mental health and wellbeing. In her account, she communicates that she is viewed as a strong person but that this was hiding her struggle with the pressure she was putting on herself to make sure she did well educationally to keep up with her friends. Moreover, due to the stigma of mental health as well as not wanting to worry them, she felt unable to confide in her parents but was grateful for the support available at her university. For other participants, they were not able to access the same support and is in part due to the lack of mental health provision available for students (Williamson, 2018). Kemi also discusses the stigma within Black communities about mental health where Black women are increasingly suffering even more (Ferguson, 2016; Cole, 2018). It must be noted that stress both exacerbates mental health problems as well as also increasing the chances of other health implications for Black women which include heart disease, stroke, cancer (Barnes, 2017) and high blood pressure (Stallings and Schneider, 2017). In addition to this, Kemi's mental health issues stem from the dangers of "the Strong Black woman" stereotype which West et al (2016: 403) find to be highly internalised by Black women even though it is contradictory where "on the one hand, it may be a positive form of coping and a protective factor for optimal mental health; on the other hand, it may be a negative form of coping and a predictive factor for poor mental health". Although many of the participants share these pressures and challenges as prominent issues at university, I argue, like Showunmi (2017) that they have been building up and are carried by many Black women throughout their journeys in the education system. University may be where they are able to identify and express their feelings in a clearer manner as they are older.

The personal struggles and internalised pressure encountered by many Black women in the pursuit of education reflects the desire to gain the relevant capitals by way of educational qualifications to provide them with a chance, that they perceive will help them to negotiate discrimination and navigate in the labour market. As Nunn (2018: 241) asserts when she employs *Super-Girl* to describe every Black girl, she means it to emphasise "a new phenomenon about balancing both strength and sadness due to regular social battles". I believe this statement to be the case for the Black women within my research. Yet, as will be shown in the next section, the Black women graduates within this study are truly committed to achieving educationally and deploy ingenious ways, supported by their families and networks to survive in the pursuit of education.

A commitment to education: strategies to succeed

As illustrated previously, journeying through the English education system is not an easy feat for many Black women who encounter significant personal challenges and struggles. Yet, the participants are all committed to their obligation to pursue education. Studies (Sharpe, 1976; Fuller, 1982; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Collins, 1990; Mirza, 1992, 1997, 2008; Mirza and Reay, 2000) have shown that the devising of ingenious strategies of resistance as well as to overcome inequalities has been a common feature within Black women's experiences of education. This is because, as noted by Ingram (2009: 423) "feeling devalued within a social system can lead to the development of resistance." In addition, according to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 101), "the field as a structure of objective relations between positions of force

undergrids and guides the strategies where occupants of these positions seek, individually or collectively, to safeguard or improve their positions…" In this way, it is not surprising as to why Black women in particular feel the need to devise different strategies to assist in their survival within the educational field. It also shows the commitment that they have to education. Participants divulged many different ways and times that they employed both individual and collective strategies to "safeguard or improve their positions" within their educational journeys. This section will focus on three of the unique ways Black women deploy these: acquiring extra support by way of parental intervention, relying on the comfort of their networks; and the changing perceptions of their Black identities.

Parental intervention

As specified by Chapman and Bhopal (2013: 568) "parents of colour are often considered hostile, non-participatory adults with minimal understandings of education." However, it became evident that participants' parents intervened within their daughters' educations in significant ways to support their achievement. Additionally, Demie and McLean (2007: 427) note in research about the achievement of African heritage pupils that parents are able to play such an active and less 'hostile' role when interacting with educational institutions and staff members because often they "have themselves received a good education and gained professional qualifications," contributing to their knowledge and understanding of the education system. Reynolds et al (2015) writes about the little attention given to the role of Black fathers within the education of their children and proceeds to centre them within their

own study. Cases like Estelle's further builds upon the lack of research as she illustrates how her father plays an active role, particularly during her primary schooling:

"There was a point where it was like we are not really doing much in class and my dad would be like "What did you do today?" And I'd be like "Nothing really". He was like "I can't be sending you to school to do nothing." So, he had a word with the headteacher and the headteacher was like "Well if you wanna give her work to do in class then you can do that." So, I used to take work in like doing 11+ practice in class and stuff like that whilst everybody else was not really doing much- that was in primary school." **(Estelle, 23, African Caribbean)**

Estelle's father's intervention consists of a number of useful steps such as: taking an interest in his daughter's education where he is able to discover that she is not being intellectually stimulated. The next step is the communication of his concerns to the school. The final step is to source and to provide his daughter with the necessary resources to enhance her educational experience, to enable her to pass the 11 +. According to Wallace (2017b), comparable steps are taken by Black Caribbean fathers in both Britain and the US who are very much involved in their children's schooling and employ strategies of distinctiveness, deference and dominance when communicating with white female teachers in particular. The lack of care or action from Estelle's headteacher is disturbing and shows the school's failure to adequately prepare their pupils for basic requirements and especially not specialised exams such as the 11+. In Sophia's anecdote, she too remembers the influence and active role that her father also played within her education:

"*My dad was extremely intellectual like smart, extremely smart and from a young age actually {laughs} he used to make me do tests at home in English, Maths, Science. Nah, I am actually serious, he used to make me do test papers, very unpleasant. When you are quite young it's not the kinda experience you wanna go through. But I thank*

him, if he was here, I'd actually thank him because it prepared me. A lot of people don't get that preparation because he was ill, he had sickle cell, that obviously hindered his ability to go through the education system, so I was next." **(Sophia, 25, Black British)**

While it is not clear whether Sophia's father also interacts with the school in the same way that Estelle's father does, he intervenes within Sophia's education by providing her with additional work which, according to Sophia did support what she learnt in school as well as instilling a strong work ethic in her. This resonates with the research by Bright and Williams (1996: 255) about Black fathers, child-rearing and education where they find that one of the significant roles that they play to their children are as 'teachers in the home', in which they "want their children to learn very early that meeting one's responsibilities is inextricably linked to success in many domains of life". In many ways Sophia's father seeks to and seems to have succeeded in doing this through making her complete additional academic work regularly at home. In the subsequent narratives from Claudia and Shakirah, they both sum up the ways in which both their parents worked together as a team to support their educations:

"Every day my dad would sit me down and we'd do the verbal reasoning tests and all that kinda stuff. I think at one point they even got- I can't remember, but I think I had a tutor for a little bit. My sister, she had a tutor to help her, she was doing her GCSEs at the time and I think I did one or two sessions then, but it was mainly my mum and dad sitting me down and making me do extra…they made me do Kumon [Japanese educational network] as well for a little bit…Year 5- I mean I always did extra work at home from like the beginning, but from year 5 is when I started having to knuckle down and they started making me do Kumon from year 6- but I think I started that too late, I should've started that earlier." **(Claudia, 24, British Ghanaian)**

By way of administering extra work to prepare Claudia for secondary entrance exams, her parents also invest in her education by paying for her (and her sister) to be given private tuition. This intervention is valuable and may have contributed to Claudia's success in gaining a place at her private secondary school. In Shakirah's words, she expresses how her parents worked in partnership to intervene and support her with any issues she encounters along her educational journey:

"In a positive way again, my parents were fantastic cos whatever I was facing, anything…Basically everywhere I went I was faced with some kinda barrier or some kinda teacher being really unfair to me, trying to block me and whenever, I'd go and report that to my parents. They were down at the college or at the school straightaway, in a meeting and just discussing what's happening here. I think that was a good influence cos it also showed me that this kinda thing isn't ok, it's not ok to be treated unfairly and you have a right to question that and to challenge it." **(Shakirah, 23, British Jamaican)**

Throughout her educational journey, the support of her parents to challenge any issues that arose is an invaluable intervention especially because unfair teacher treatment can negatively impact upon a student's attainment. In addition, this suggests that her parents are able to negotiate and navigate the educational field in a way that is conducive to Shakirah's wellbeing, confidence and achievement. This is demonstrated by Crozier (1996) who details how Black parents in her investigations understand the educational process, their rights and pedagogical issues and therefore are better able to support their children. However, it must be noted that social class largely influences the participants' parents abilities to effectively navigate within the education system where it has been found that Black middle-class parents, who possess the cultural capital and resources, are able to do so with (more) ease compared to their Black working class counterparts (Lareau and Horvat, 1999;

Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Diamond and Gomez, 2004; Bodovski, 2010; Rollock et al, 2015).

Parental intervention shows the collective action of the participants and their parents to enhance and support their educational experiences at pivotal points in their journeys. These findings correspond with Vincent et al (2012b) who illustrates the ways in which Black middle-class parents engage in strategic, watchful and determined stances when it comes to supporting their children within the education system. The second strategy that the Black women within this research resort to are their extended networks of friendship groups and older peers.

Networks

As stated by George (2007: 127), "it is unsurprising that black girls, with their different history and heritage rooted in past racism, as well as different futures dictated by institutional racism, will make friends with girls who share similar backgrounds." Building on from George's assertion, Simone powerfully articulates the friendships and networks that are created by Black girls and women which she believes encapsulates the "Black British female experience" in education:

"I think the Black British female experience- uni, sixth form, high school- is sticking together. I think there's a lot more of a sisterhood, even like from my second primary school, that even though I didn't use the word, it was a sisterhood at the end of the day, the fact that I could go to…and I wanted to be in this group of Black girls, it was very specifically Black girls that I wanted to be a part of, and it wasn't just because "Oh y'know we can talk about.." I just felt a lot safer with them. With Black girls it was very sacred, it was very much, "This is our space!" That's from like 10-year olds as well, and I think high school, when we became 15, the breaking offs were still like Black

centred as well. There was still that clinging to Black women kinda thing. Then of course, when I got to uni that's what I wanted, I wanted genuine open discussions which is what I got with Black women who I could share and be like "Oh this has happened, has this happened to you?" I think that's one thing, we do- one thing about the Black British female experience is not just having but seeking it out and like building a sisterhood and then making it bigger. So, it's not just like "Oh my friendship group," but like "There's this event and then there's this," do you know what I mean? It does reach out a lot more." **(Simone, 21, Caribbean British)**

Within her extract, she denotes how friendships created by Black girls and women are "sacred" and akin to sisterhoods which are actively sought after by Black girls and women in order to supply valuable and vital fictive kinship in the often hostile educational field (Tierney and Venegas, 2006; Greyerbiehl and Mitchell, 2014; Cook and Williams, 2015). This network or sisterhood enables Black girls and women to not only carve out a space, but to define its boundaries and to own and belong to something bigger and greater than their own individual existence within educational institutions (Carter, 2007; Kynard, 2010). This network bestows an ethics of care (Collins, 1990: 215-217) for its members and a space for them to be heard, nurtured and affirmed (Weekes, 2003). Similarly, Rachel contributes to this notion of sisterhood by revealing the reasons why they are created:

"Within education I would say there are a lot of similarities. I feel like we are aware that we are underrepresented so we try and support each other as much as possible and when there is conflict, we try and resolve it as much as possible because it's like "You are my one Black female friend." That's the thing, we have to stick together, I think there is a lot of solidarity between Black females and Black students in general." **(Rachel, 23, Mixed- Black and Jewish)**

Rachel's awareness of herself and other Black women being "underrepresented" speaks to the ways that many Black women become "outsiders within" (Collins, 1986) in educational institutions as evidenced in the previous chapter; and therefore, lack real power in the space (Turner, 2002; Terhune, 2008). Within networks or sisterhoods, through "sticking together" Rachel believes that Black women and girls are able to gain "solidarity" and strength to support their educational journeys (Rollock et al, 1992). Next, Adeola discusses the networks that were cultivated during her time studying medicine:

"*So, people that actually looked out for you were the older years in the same way when I was at secondary school. There weren't many Black kids, there wasn't many Black kids in med school either and then it also became very apparent on the wards that there wasn't many of us. So, the older years used to be like "Alright, you can't speak like this, talk like this, walk like this, act like this." So, they used to give out gentle advice for when we came/ when we were students on the wards. Because there were so few of us, I think we didn't have time to hate each other, we had to be everyone's champion. If one did well we were like "Yes, well done!" You are representing the rest of us so it was that element of "Go you!" At least one of us did well!"* **(Adeola, 26, Nigerian)**

Bourdieu (1996) discusses the significant role of both cultural and social capital in order to assist in educational success. Adeola demonstrates its operation as the older Black students pass on valuable information to the younger students- of which Adeola is one- about the unwritten rules that underpin the field and therefore additional ways that they should be altering themselves in order to fit in- something which many white students do not have to do as they can be themselves. The fact that there are so few other Black students suggests that those students represent the minority from within their ethnocultural group that actually benefitted from their albeit limited access

to these social and cultural capital and speaks to how race can hinder the scope and access to it (Hardie, 2015; Hedegard; 2018). Additionally, Adeola highlights the performative nature of habitus which inscribes the role of a medical student and how one should 'act' and 'be' when taking up this position (Butler, 1988, 1990, 1993). Adeola is also speaking to the sense of solidarity previously mentioned by Simone and Rachel by way of the Black students supporting each other and celebrating their achievements which is much harder to achieve, considering how underrepresented Black students are in the field (Payne and Suddler, 2014; Lane, 2017). Moreover, this strategy of "sticking together" is also present amongst other marginalised British Asian female students (Bhopal, 2010; Bhopal, 2011b). The final strategy is an internal one.

Changed perceptions of Black identities

Collins (1990) advocates the power of self-definition and finding a voice which are fundamental themes within Black Feminist Thought. This is because, "Black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as [Black] women with our objectification as the Other….[this] struggle of two lives…creates a peculiar tension to extract the definition of one's true self from the treatment afforded the denigrated categories in which all Black women are placed," (ibid: 94). Likewise, Mirza (1997) describes the function of Black feminism as a way to create a sense of belonging, connection and community for Black women who are often excluded from being part of these elsewhere. It can also offer empowerment in that it creates somewhere for the lived experiences of Black women to be central where, "we as racialised, gendered

subjects can collectively mark our presence in a world where black women have for so long been denied the privilege to speak; to have a 'valid' identity for our own, [and] a space to 'name' ourselves," (Mirza, 1997: 4).

Here, the employment of Critical Race Theory (CRT) emphasises the inherent racist nature of the educational system and its implications on those at the receiving end. The dominance of white supremacy in educational institutions which privileges, prioritises and promotes the perceived superiority of whiteness in knowledge, perceptions and thus success, creates the illusion that meritocracy and neutrality are central within education, so everyone is valued and able to achieve equally. But through recognition of such processes, CRT challenges such ideologies of meritocracy and neutrality, instead illuminating how they have become "'taken-for granted' racialised processes," (Warmington, 2012: 9) which ignore the skewed structures which privilege whiteness and disadvantages the knowledge, perceptions and persons of colour. The Black British women within this study were not discouraged despite experiencing many barriers. Instead, they decided to overcome the barriers by empowering themselves as a reminder of why they should continue to work hard and 'taking up space' within a hostile education system (Kwakye and Ogunbiyi, 2019). This was demonstrated via the following examples where the graduates changed their perceptions of their Black identities by how they operationalise it and what they expect to gain from the education system as a result of such operationalising. Deja discusses embarking on a journey to become her authentic self by embracing her natural hair and wearing "bright colours in corporate colour environments." In doing so, Deja openly disrupts educational spaces with her presence and therefore challenges the boundaries and external forces that seek to position her as either an "outsider within" or 'the unruly Black girl' as mentioned in chapter 6:

"I don't want to conform; I want the things that make me different to stand out so that you can see it. I think that's why I have my nails as long as I want or I have my hair as natural as I want it to be and I wear bright colours in corporate colour environments, because it is becoming more ok for you to be yourself. But I'm also seeing it as being unapologetic about being who I am and being authentically me because there's more value in that and it's more sustainable. In the education system, in terms of at university you don't have a uniform so you can see it from the things people wear and me coming to lectures and I'll wear my Afrocentric earrings without thinking about it because that's the style I want to wear, and seeing other Black girls who act in the same way…So I think it is about becoming, because they are doing it independently themselves, then the things and the environments that they are going to such as the education sector, they will bring themselves with them. I think that there is an integration between the two because that accepting of yourself allows you to then move into different environments and then be yourself." **(Deja, 23, Black British Caribbean)**

Deja's desire to make her differences stand out as well as seeing value in doing so is exactly what Collins (1990) proclaims when she advocates the power in Black feminist standpoint where "there is a specialised knowledge produced by black women that clarifies a particular standpoint of and about black women," (Reynolds, 2002: 596). From this standpoint, Black women are able to use the strength of marginal positions by using innovative ways or in the case of Deja, disruptive ways to challenge the perceived norm about who should be in that space, what they should look like and what they should wear. In fact, Deja employs her style of dress in this process of redefinition by boldly wearing 'afrocentric earrings' and notes that other Black women are also taking similar steps. This and similar acts "emerge from a different location…fundamental to the process of decentring the oppressive other and claiming our right to subjectivity and is the insistence that we must determine how we will be

and not rely on colonising responses to determine our legitimacy," (hooks, 1990: 22). Deja's actions are also very different to what Ricks (2014: 14) points out that Black girls survive in educational contexts "by adopting a "race-less" persona." Through self-defining themselves in these spaces, the possibilities of their identities are endless and unrestricted which is supported by Deja when she talks about being able to develop and get to this point where she is still "becoming" and self-acceptance. Deja can also be seen to be drawing upon and developing her own conception of Black womanhood and identity. Collins (2009: xii) declares that "when an individual Black woman's consciousness concerning how she understands her everyday life undergoes change, she can become empowered. Such consciousness may stimulate her to embark on a path of personal freedom, even if it exists initially primarily in her own mind". As shown by Kemi, this personal freedom can translate into educational achievement and gaining high level positions in the labour market as well as the role of university as an agent for self-reflection leading to the burgeoning of authentic identities:

"I feel like we are valuing our worth more, we are understanding that we can also be powerful, we are not trying to let anyone suppress us. I might live in Britain and my Prime Minister might be white, and a lot of people around me are white, and my manager might be in a good position and I am probably doing the job better than her- all these things. But I feel like we [Black women] are valuing it more to the sense like ***"Look I have gone through the education system and I have tried damn hard to get where I am, so no one is gonna stop me!"*** *It's empowering because that means the next generation of Black British females are also gonna be that way and they are gonna improve on that and grow on that and eventually in the next years hopefully we will start seeing 50% of these FTSE100 companies having Black British female CEOs and people on the board. It's inspiring, I will say that, but it's not easy, it is hard and it is a lot of pressure especially if you don't succeed in the education system as a Black*

British female- you are looked at like "What is wrong with you?"" **(Kemi, 24, Nigerian-British)**

Paulo Freire (2000: 44) introduced the notion of critical consciousness where the challenging of oppression, which is equal to dehumanisation, allows individuals and groups to become "more fully human". Moreover, in important work by Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015) who build upon the foundations laid by Freire and other critical consciousness scholars, they put forward the key elements for Critical Consciousness to develop. These are: *critical social analysis or reflection* - "a recognition of social inequalities and an understanding of the unjust exercise of sociopolitical power that creates them"(Watts and Hipolito-Delgado, 2015: 849- 850); *collective identification* - "feelings of solidarity, collective efficacy, and shared culture"; *political self-efficacy* - "a growing a sense of confidence or a motive to take action to improve one's status in society"; and *sociopolitical action* - "the ultimate goal of action is gaining full control over one's sociopolitical circumstances". Kemi exemplifies many of these key elements; for instance, she understands that she is a minority within a sea of a predominantly white society and workplace as well as how this whiteness, embedded with unwritten boundaries and rules, excludes people like herself from accessing particular positions (critical social analysis or reflection). She then frames this within a wider and collective Black British female experience (collective identification); she displays self-confidence in her worth, value and abilities bolstered by her educational credentials (political self-efficacy); and lastly, she believes that she is unstoppable as "no one is gonna stop me" from progressing and she feels that is applicable to future generations of Black girls too (sociopolitical action). Though Kemi's account is not limited to discussing how she positions herself exclusively within educational contexts, the 'seeds' for such a transformation were planted within them. Through Kemi's

recollections of how hard she has worked to go through the education system as well as within the workplace; her desire for it to be better for other Black girls and young women, displays an ethics of caring which is a key component of Black Feminist epistemology comprising of "the value placed on individual expressiveness, the appropriateness of emotions, and the capacity for empathy," (Collins, 1990: 216).

This section has illustrated three main strategies that the Black British women within this study have employed throughout their educational journeys. These strategies have been both individual where they have taken onus to change their perceptions of their identities; as well as collective by way of parental intervention and network support. Ultimately, they emphasise the commitment that participants had to completing their education.

The limitations of understandings about educational 'success'

Despite the additional efforts that go into navigating through the education system for Black women, as Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999: 161) argue, "it is unclear whether black students are rewarded in the same manner as their white counterparts". This is why I critique educational success as I argue that the definition does not consider the differing positions individuals and groups enter the education field from (Bourdieu, 1977; Harker, 1990; Hirsh, 2007); the unfair playing field[111], or the obstacles that are overcome to reach the point of graduation (Mirza, 1992; 1997; 2006a; 2006b, 2008; Chavous and Cogburn, 2007; Ricks, 2014). It also does not consider whether good grades truly open up opportunities within the labour market

[111] Or 'education marathon' as I refer to the education system in the introduction

(Hilpern, 2008; Foley and Brinkley, 2015; Trade Union Congress, 2016). Therefore, I argue that educational success is narrowly defined and inaccessible for certain groups. This argument is built upon by Ringrose (2007) when she states that the educational success of girls is often pitted against boys' disadvantage/success which fits into an individualised neo-liberal discourse that obscures the role of identities such as race, ethnicity and class in issues of achievement.

What constitutes educational success can be viewed in myriad ways (Praag et al, 2015; York et al, 2015) but increasingly, one such way is the culmination of years in education where one graduates from university with good grades[112] and educational qualifications. By this definition, many of the Black women in this study are educationally successful. Yet, what underpins educational success in most societies is meritocracy which "has been used to establish a link between individual effort and desert, mediated through education," (Souto-Otero, 2010: 399). This meritocratic ideology means that "whites believe equal opportunity is the rule and that the free market operates fairly and impartially. Therefore, according to this view, material differences [and educational] between whites and blacks represent differences in merit," (Rousseau, 2006:124). However, many have branded meritocracy a myth (Themelis, 2008; Crawford, 2010) and a white middle-class privilege (Knowles and Lowery, 2012; Crozier, 2018). As mentioned previously, all of the Black women in this study buy into meritocracy while still noticing its limitations in their experiences.

Moreover, the high value placed on education, along with the obligation and motivations that implore these Black women to succeed - in which the acquisition of qualifications signifies - are evident in the narratives of all the participants. In this sense, it can be argued that educational credentials become what Bourdieu and

[112] A good degree is seen to be a 2.1 or a First

Wacquant (1992: 98) has referred to as 'trump cards' in that they are "valid, efficacious in all fields- these are the fundamental species of capital - but their relative value as trump cards is determined by each field and even by the successive states of the field". In this way, as has been demonstrated previously in this chapter, the huge investments made in the pursuit of education, where the Black women graduates have faced many pressures, struggles and challenges along with developing a variety of strategies becomes a basic element precisely as these qualifications are "a species of capital…efficacious in a given field, both as a weapon and as a stake of struggle, that which allows its possessors to wield a power, an influence, and thus to *exist*, in the field under consideration, instead of being considered a negligible quantity," [emphasis in original] (Bourdieu, 1992: 98). Within interviews, several participants also critiqued the nature of the education system and current understandings of educational success:

"I mean the education system as a whole, ultimately it wasn't really made for all the people that are now entering it. It wasn't really made really for women. It wasn't really made for Black people. It wasn't really made for working class people. So, working class Black women - it really wasn't made for them at all! It wasn't! So, the structures of it don't allow people to flourish in it." **(Claudia, 24, British Ghanaian)**

In many ways, Claudia speaks to the limitations she feels are historically embedded into the education system, which excluded many groups and although they are now able to participate, there remains many mechanisms that operate which does not facilitate these groups to, as she says, truly "flourish" within it (Reay, 2012). Moreover, if we understand the education system to be fulfilling a particular function, that is, to reproduce and maintain divisions within society (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984; 1996) and to uphold white supremacy (Ladson- Billings, 1998; Gillborn, 2005); the

words of Lorde (1984: 112) are fundamental to note where she asserts that: "*the masters tools will never dismantle the master's house.* They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change," [emphasis in original]. Claudia has illustrated her own awareness of this within her extract. Following on from this, Kemi expresses the fact that navigating the education system is not a straightforward endeavour and that the acquisition of educational credentials sometimes does not lead to ease in accessing opportunities in the labour market:

"I think Black people know that it is harder for them, so we all share that common grievance with the world I suppose. Like "Why is this happening to me? Why is this going wrong?" And I think when you come out of uni and you try to apply for jobs and things like that, you start to realise that the grade you got doesn't really matter. They are now looking at your name and who you are, and I think we know that." **(Kemi, 24, Nigerian-British)**

Kemi communicates a similar point made in chapter 5 that in essence, her degree becomes worthless in the labour market where other markers are instead considered. In his chapter, Bourdieu (1999) explains the ways in which the supposedly democratised education system that encourages the participation of all, in actual fact, forces different groups into hierarchical educational pathways and thus impacts the kinds of labour market opportunities they will have. But this is not the case for Kemi who attended a pre-1992 university- therefore, on paper she should have good labour market opportunities according to Bourdieu. The process that Kemi has named is one way that certain groups are kept in inferior positions because with the inclusion of once-excluded groups into the education system, "after an extended school career, which often entails considerable sacrifice, the most culturally disadvantaged run the

risk of ending up with a devalued degree," (Bourdieu, 1999: 23). While Kemi does not say her degree is devalued, she illustrates that it is the holder of the degree to which negative associations are applied. Unfortunately for many Black women, during their educations and in spite of their acquired educational credentials, they are often viewed as being culturally disadvantaged and deficient (Carter, 2003; Yosso, 2005, Wallace, 2017a).

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has illustrated that the pursuit of education for the Black women graduates in this study are both individual and collective actions. This has been demonstrated by the importance of education for the Black women graduates where the influencing factors that motivate them include an obligation to themselves, their families and wider communities as well as ultimately, the desire to navigate the labour market with ease. Yet, they encounter individual personal struggles and challenges along the way comprising of not fitting in, exemplified by racial and culture differences, ethnocentric curriculums and the intrinsic white middle-class norms and values; as well as the internalisation of pressure which contributes to poor mental health and wellbeing. However, the participants show a strong commitment to education where, to survive and succeed within the education system, within this chapter, they employ three types of strategies that were developed both individually and collectively to overcome the obstacles. These strategies can best be understood under three headings: parental intervention, relying on vital networks of friendships and older Black students, and changed perceptions of their Black

identities. Lastly, the notion of educational success was critiqued as narrowly defined when considering the educational journeys of the Black women graduates. This is due to its meritocratic and neoliberal discourse and assertions about whether the struggles faced to achieve educational success by the Black women were worth the returns. The next chapter will conclude this thesis, bringing together all the findings to answer the research questions and to offer recommendations.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this final chapter, the conclusions and recommendations that emerged from the study will be shared. Firstly, I remind readers of the research aims, summarising the key findings of the research questions. Secondly, I highlight the theoretical contributions that this thesis has made to knowledge, in the fields of Black feminism and the sociology of education more widely. Thirdly, I reflect upon the outcomes and relative success of my participants. I will then discuss the study's limitations. Fourthly, I present future research directions and how the research findings can be communicated to targeted audiences. Thereafter, specific recommendations, in order to better support the learning experiences of Black British young women navigating within the English education system will be shared. These recommendations derive from some of the participants' reflections on their own educational experiences, as well as, how this study can contribute to discussions in terms of equality and diversity policy. Lastly, I end this thesis with some final words on the resilience, strength and perseverance that characterised the participants, as expressed by Janaya.

Research aims

This study sought to illuminate the educational journeys and experiences of 25 Black British women graduates. It had 3 key aims:

- To centre and amplify the narratives of Black British women graduates about their educational experiences and journeys

- To highlight and understand the interplay and operation of identities within the education system and how these impact on Black British women graduates
- To demonstrate some of the unique challenges encountered by this group, but also how they have responded to overcome these

These aims were addressed through asking the following research questions:

1. What are the educational journeys and experiences of Black British women graduates?
    a. What are the characteristics of the educational journeys of Black British women graduates and what are the key decisions and choices that have shaped their journeys?
    b. What was the roles of the family and extended networks in shaping these educational journeys and experiences?
    c. What roles did ethnicity, cultural background and social class (along with race and gender) play in mediating the aspirations, strategies and decision-making of Black British women graduates throughout their educational journeys?

Research findings

In this section, I present the research findings to answer the research questions.

1. **What are the educational journeys and experiences of Black British women graduates?**

The research findings illustrate that the educational journeys and experiences of the 25 Black British women graduates are varied and influenced by many different factors but unanimously underpinned by resilience, strength, perseverance and high aspirations to gain the necessary qualifications in order to provide further opportunities for themselves as exemplified in chapter 7. However, the experiences shared are indicative of the 25 participants and are the basis on which more general comments about Black women graduates in general can be made. Moreover, with the employment of my theoretical frameworks and applying these to my analysis of participant narratives, I have been able to identify a systemic social concern that is applicable to a particular heterogenous group. Within chapter 5, it highlighted that in order to understand the educational journeys and experiences of Black British women graduates, it is imperative that there is a more nuanced understanding of the diversity within the group and how race, culture, ethnicity, gender and social class identities intersect. This emphasized the unequal power relations embedded within the education system and how for Black African and Black African-Caribbean British women they can operate differently. These considerations and understandings were considered in chapters 2 and 3 which showed how developments in the field and how particular frameworks can show the impact upon Black British women's educations. Moreover, chapter 6 demonstrated that there are distinct educational journeys that Black British women graduates have experienced which were evidenced through the range and types of educational institutions that they had studied within.

a. **What are the characteristics of the educational journeys of Black British women graduates and what are the key decisions and choices that have shaped their journeys?**

The research findings indicate that some of the shared characteristics of the educational journeys of the 25 Black British women graduates depends on the types of educational institutions within which they are educated within. In chapter 6, the journeys of Black British women graduates were divided into two broad educational trajectories based on 'being the only one' compared to 'being one of many'.

In terms of 'being the only one', this included predominantly white institutions such as schools outside of inner cities in suburban areas, as well as grammar or private schools and sixth-form colleges within those, and elite or pre-1992 universities. Therefore, Black British women who had been educated within certain predominantly white institutions like grammar and private secondary schools tended to have parents with the social and cultural capital to navigate the educational systems and specifically those types of institutions, as the participants had to prepare to sit entrance exams as these institutions were often academically selective. Some of these institutions like private schools also required possession of financial capital; and the kinds of academic support that these participants received differed greatly in terms of quality in these institutions. While all of these would be required by white parents and students, due to antiblack racism, Black 'capital' is often viewed as deficit which puts Black parents and their children at a disadvantage. I also outlined in chapter 3 and 6 the issue of whiteness and how the process of navigating hegemonic 'whiteness' of the different aspects of the education system was necessary in order for participants to complete

their education successfully, as well as dealing with the additional psycho, social pressures that they encountered as marginalised outsiders (Doharty, 2019).

In regard to ‘being one of many’ which includes multicultural spaces found in inner cities, state schools and sixth forms, further education colleges as well as post-1992 universities, participants discussed the restricted academic support they received within such institutions, how there was ‘strength in numbers’ as they were able to see themselves represented in their peer and friendship groups, but how they often felt like they were positioned as “the unruly Black girl” within these institutions and for example, disciplined more harshly compared to their counterparts.

Moreover, in chapter 7, additional characteristics that are uniquely experienced by Black British women graduates within their educational journeys suggested that they felt strong obligations to self, families and wider communities to achieve educational success. Yet, their educational journeys consisted of many personal struggles that were brought about by way of such factors as the ethnocentricity of the curriculum and internalised pressure where they believed they could not fail, leading to poor mental health for some of the participants. In order to succeed and in ways which reinforced their high aspirations and strong commitments to education, strategies were developed and became another characteristic of their educational journeys. Such strategies included: parental intervention, relying on networks and changed perceptions about their Black identities.

The characteristics mentioned previously also connected to the key decisions and choices that shaped the Black British women graduates’ educational journeys. For example, in chapter 7, participants actively made decisions and choices to change their mindsets about their Black identities and thus what they expected from the education system by repositioning themselves and rejecting racist and sexist tropes,

carving out their own spaces to display true, empowered, optimistic versions of themselves. Additionally, by choosing to view their pursuit of education as obligations not only to themselves but their families and wider communities, it shaped their educational journeys in that it showed the high stakes within these feats. Likewise, despite the personal challenges that they faced, the choice and decisions to develop and employ particular strategies indicates that there is an awareness of how inequalities shape their educational journeys, but that they are so committed to gaining their qualifications that instead of giving up, they proceed in ways that require additional effort which are deemed to be worth enduring.

b. What was the roles of the family and extended networks in shaping these educational journeys and experiences?

The research findings highlight the crucial role of the family and extended networks in shaping educational journeys and experiences of the 25 Black British women graduates in this study. In chapter 6, family - particularly parents, are key in selecting, preparing and financing the participants within all educational institutions. Extended networks are also crucial for participants 'being one of many' within multicultural educational institutions by way of close friendship groups of similar cultural backgrounds which participants express adds value to their educational journeys and experiences within these spaces in terms of being represented and affirmed. This also emerges in chapter 7 when participants discuss strategies that include networks in the form of friendship groups and Black students in older years which assist in helping the participants to overcome struggles and challenges, they face along the way. In Chapter 7, the evidence suggests that family and wider communities contribute a great

deal to shaping educational journeys and experiences. They do so in terms of instilling high aspirations and the importance of pursuing education which is manifested by the participants as an obligation and a deep commitment to achieving.

c. What roles did ethnicity, cultural background and social class (along with race and gender) play in mediating the aspirations, strategies and decision-making of Black British women graduates throughout their educational journeys?

The roles of ethnicity, cultural background and social class were illustrated in a number of ways within the research findings. Firstly, chapter 5, initially set out to answer this, which was built upon in subsequent chapters, by highlighting the diversity within Black British women graduates' educational journeys based upon differences in terms of ethnicity and cultural background and social class identities within the 'Black' group. In this way, it showed how and why research needs to go beyond focusing on broadly characterised 'Black' identities which are usually British Caribbean and working-class experiences. The prominence of social class was discussed more in chapter 6 where it influenced the types of educational institutions available to the participants in which participants from mainly lower middle-class and middle-class backgrounds were more likely to attend predominantly white, private and grammar schools and post-16 institutions as well as pre-1992 and elite universities compared to their working-class Black British women graduate counterparts. However, social class was mediated by race and it became evident in chapter 6 that despite some of the Black British women graduates having middle-class backgrounds and attending predominantly white elite educational institutions, they had challenges navigating the

whiteness as their Black identity positioned them as “outsiders within”. Ethnicity and cultural background, functioned in similar ways to social class as a crucial factor- particularly in chapter 7- as an extension of race, in instilling the importance of education and the strong obligations and commitment felt by participants to achieve educationally, and was somewhat a collective project. In this way, ethnicity, cultural background, race and gender mediated each other as the awareness of being Black British women of African and/or Caribbean descent can be attributed to the high aspirations that many of the participants displayed.

Overall, the research findings show how the intersectional identities of the participants in which their ethnicity, cultural backgrounds, social classes, race and gender intersect greatly influenced and mediated their educational journeys. This was because, the awareness of discriminatory practices, informed by their parental educational interventions in schools, strengthened their aspirations where education had to be achieved at any cost which in turn led to the development of strategies in chapter 7 and making particular decisions such as finding ways to navigate whiteness or changing their perceptions in order to succeed.

Having answered the research questions, I now highlight the significant contributions that my research has made to knowledge in the following section.

Theoretical contributions to knowledge

As is evident within the recommendations section later in this chapter, this thesis can be useful to a range of different groups who wish to gain insights about the challenges faced by Black British women, and the ways that can better support their educational experiences and journeys.

This study has illustrated and articulated the shift in conceptual understandings and categories that has taken place, particularly within disciplines such as sociology, in regards to the awareness of the significant and overlapping roles that identities such as gender, social class, race, culture and ethnicity play within group's and individuals' lives within the organisation of Western societies and inequalities. Moreover, this study has empirically detailed and explicated the complexity of intersectional identities- a particular focus of chapter 5- in terms of what it means to be British, Black, a woman and a graduate along with understandings about social class.

Additionally, this study has further contributed to a rich understanding of the term 'Black' by illustrating the complex nature of ethnicity and culture, as well as social class diversity in relation to educational experiences. It has also acknowledged and included the voices of Black British women of African descent, alongside Caribbean, which has seldom been explored before in this area. This imparts a sociologically informed, inclusive and nuanced account of the groups' educational experiences and trajectories.

By critiquing the narrow view of educational 'success', this research has provided an additional contribution to knowledge, particularly highlighting that meritocratic and neoliberal discourses of educational 'success', fails to acknowledge the structural inequalities and the restricted educational investment returns experienced by many 'successful' Black British women graduates[113]. This is illustrated by the thesis' focus on the full educational trajectory and experiences of participants, from primary school until university. This is done in order to emphasise the sequential nature of the English education system and how each stage cannot be viewed in isolation. This is further exemplified by the comparison of different educational

[113] This will be discussed later in the chapter when I reflect on the participants' outcomes

institutions, as exemplified within chapter 6, which is another unique contribution in regard to how Black British women experience different barriers within predominantly white institutions, 'being the only one', as well as in multicultural institutions 'being one of many'.

More generally, the exploratory initial findings about the elements that comprise to cause the mental difficulties experienced by Black women journeying in the education system, as well as the inclusion in the discourse of the role of Black fathers within their daughter's educations in chapter 7, provide a direction for further research within English/British educational research. This study has illustrated significant expertise in the field of BAME educational experiences and considerations to build on approaches to widen participation and how to develop culturally relevant curriculums and pedagogy.

Additionally, within this thesis, the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory and Bourdieu's theory of Practice are drawn upon and placed within the overarching context of Black Feminist epistemology. It is through Critical Race Theory and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice that a sociological perspective is provided to articulate specific elements of the Black women's educational experiences and journeys, namely how race, racism and social class are embedded into the institutional structures of the education system. With the incorporation of intersectionality, it weaves through, as well as brings together the triad of Black Feminism, Critical Race Theory and Bourdieu's theory of practice, within the recognition of the holistic identities of Black British women. This is illustrated in how my empirical evidence supports this theoretical contribution, particularly in chapter 5, when participants discuss how their gender identities[114] operate within their educational experiences and journeys when

[114] See page 146 onwards

Ebony describes how whiteness, social class (by way of finance) and perceptions of femininity (by way of appearances) marginalises her in the context of her predominantly white private secondary school. Again, this is echoed at the end of chapter 7 in the words of Claudia[115] who summarises the inherent classed, raced and gendered inequalities that underpin the education system, hence why journeying through it as a Black British woman can be difficult. This study uses the construct of intersectionality in order to enable the nuances of the participants' ethnicities and cultural backgrounds to be expressed, alongside their other identities. These additional dimensions of the graduates' identities played a crucial role in the research to highlight the diversity of this group and how these identities provided powerful additional resources to the participants. It is this richness and diversity within Black identities and groups that has meant that my research has begun to develop an **intersectional Black epistemological framework[116]** to understand the antiblack systemic challenges of the education system, and how this specifically impacts Black British women.

This study also challenges Black feminism by recognising that it doesn't fully acknowledge or represent specific aspects of Black women's educations and progression. This is illustrated in my need to draw on Critical Race Theory and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. Yet, my employment of Black Feminist epistemology continued to build upon the powerful foundations and contributions of radical Black feminists, who emphasise the cultural and colonial legacies that Black women operate within in Western societies, like: Saidiya Hartman (1997; 2007; 2019); Sylvia Wynter (1962; 1995; 2003); Katherine McKittrick (2006; and Woods, 2007); Dorothy Roberts

[115] See page 247
[116] This is similar but slightly different to the framework developed by Mirza and Gunaratnam, 2014; Mirza, 2015

(1997; 2003; 2011), Angela Davis (1981; 1989;1998) and Gail Lewis (2000)- to name a few.

Having answered the research questions and detailing the significant contributions that this thesis has made to knowledge, I will outline and share reflections regarding this research.

Where are they now?: Reflections on the outcomes of the Black British women graduate participants

As previously mentioned in chapter 4, as part of my epistemological and ontological stances, alongside my theoretical approaches, it was important to centre the participants' voices. One way that this was achieved was by asking participants to write their own biographies[117] and thus providing more insights into their thoughts, feelings and positionings as graduates who had 'successfully' navigated through the education system. From these participant biographies, it indicates that, regardless of the different types of educational institutions attended, academic pathways chosen, or challenges and difficulties encountered, the participants in this study have all been relatively 'successful.' Such 'success' is evident in that, many have found employment, have/are pursuing further study and generally have clear visions and goals as to what they wish to accomplish with their lives. In this way, it can be argued that, for these 25 Black British women graduates, their educations- and particularly the acquisition of the necessary qualifications and credentials- played a significant role in preparing

[117] See appendix 3 on page 336

them to enter into the labour market though, their continued additional efforts in order for them to continue to succeed has been alluded to at the end of chapter 7 by Kemi.

Yet, these life journeys and realities, as well as the relative success of the participants' outcomes beyond education warrant further investigation to ascertain more insight, particularly as they do not reflect the realities of many other Black women. This is because, it is widely established that certain British ethnic minority graduates disproportionately experience ethnic penalties in the labour market (Li and Heath 2010; Berthoud, 2010; TUC, 2016a; Morris, 2015; Zwysen and Longhi, 2016; 2018; Weekes-Bernard, 2017; Li, 2018; ONS, 2019; Li and Heath, 2020). Moreover, and specifically to Black British graduates, it was found that they are most likely to come from and to go on to live in poverty as "Black households were most likely out of all ethnic groups to have a weekly income of less than £400," (Gov.uk, 2019c). Additionally, such ethnic penalties in the labour market are further exacerbated when gender intersects (TUC, 2006; Nandi and Platt, 2010; Hills et al, 2015; Hall et al, 2017; Breach et al, 2017). Collins (2009: 228) has written extensively about the reasons for the specific disadvantage faced by Black women, which she articulates in her concept of "the matrix of domination", underpinned by power relations and "the overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained." These intersecting oppressions are most apparent in the fact that Black British women are most likely to be in insecure and low paid employment by way of zero-hour contracts and temporary jobs (TUC, 2016b).

Within her book, Bhopal (2018: 159) asserts that Black and minority ethnic groups in both the US and the UK are consistently disadvantaged as "white groups who occupy positions of power…use white privilege as a means of protecting their position and their power," which is evident in every aspect of society. This has

previously been explained by Sue (2003: 138) who argues that such unfair labour outcomes for Black and minority ethnic groups are not merely coincidences, but rather are the result of the "unearned benefits and advantages" given to white groups, based on a system "normed and standardized on White-European values, with most of the structures, policies and practices of the institutions being situated in such a manner as to pave the road for white individuals while creating obstacles for other groups." Therefore, it is unsurprising that the inequalities of the education system, as highlighted in this study, will not cease, but instead will continue within the labour market. In this way, unfortunately, for many Black British women, they will continuously find it difficult to escape the 'sticky floors' and break the 'glass ceilings', or more accurately 'concrete ceilings' that keep them at the bottom of the labour market- even if they are armed with their qualifications (Christofides et al, 2010; Tan 2017).

Limitations

As shown within chapter 4, I ensured that I was reflexive throughout the research process which included considerations of my thoughts and feelings as documented in my research journal and my positionality as a third-generation, Black British woman graduate myself. Following on from the reflexive nature of this research, in this section, I will once again state and discuss some of the limitations of this study.

My sample consisted of 25 Black British women graduates who had all been educated within the English education system and who had graduated from an English university between 2014-2017. In this way, through the employment of snowball and purposive sampling, this meant that I was quite specific in my requirements about the women that I selected to interview. I discussed the reasons for these requirements

such as my desire to talk to relatively recent graduates, to guarantee Black British perspectives and to focus on consistent experiences within the English education system in chapter 4. However, while these requirements were beneficial in many ways, it can also be viewed as a limitation. For example, initially, it meant that I turned down interest in the study shown by Black British women who had graduated before 2014 and after 2017, I didn't pursue Black British women who attended universities in Scotland or Wales. If I had included these Black British women's educational experiences and journeys, it could have potentially led to even richer insights and additional considerations when exploring this topic. In addition, one of the aims of this study was to showcase the diversity within Black Britishness by focusing on ethnicity and cultural background along with race (and other identities). While to some extent, this study did achieve this by including the voices and experiences of Black British women of African heritage, there was not an even distribution of participants from the huge Black diaspora in England and was reflected in how I presented the data. Additionally, throughout the thesis, not all of the 25 participant stories were shared equally in the findings chapters which can be seen as a limitation. However, participants were privileged in relation to their insights to the subjects being discussed. This could have been countered by interviewing a higher number of Black British women and selecting participants with greater emphasis of their heritages for a more balanced sample. Furthermore, the focus on intersectional identities concentrated on race, ethnicity/culture, gender and social class and disregarded religious identity which is quite prominent within educational experiences and journeys for example, in the types of educational institutions one may attend. By focusing on religious identity along with the other identities, even more nuanced understandings could have been generated.

Moreover, aside from distinguishing between different educational institutions by way of predominantly white in contrast to multicultural, I did not engage with the other characteristics of educational institutions such as if they were religious, single sex, specialist etc. and the role these characteristics played in participants' experiences. Although, this choice was made to avoid complicating the narratives shared, these added considerations could again have shed additional and novel insights.

Another limitation of this study would be the data collection which was completed by way of one semi-structured interview per participant. This was due to time restrictions which can be attributed to funding as well as the extra time that it took to obtain ethical approval and suitable places- free of charge- to carry out interviews, and the availability of participants. On the other hand, as the interviews were very in-depth, it did generate rich data in which additional interviews may have complicated the process of interpretation and the thesis structure. Yet, I do acknowledge that additional follow-up interviews, not necessarily from all participants, could have been advantageous to the content of the data.

Future Research directions

Reimagining the English education system: Black British girls' Edutopia

The racist, sexist and classist foundations of the English education system as identified within this study highlights the unique struggles and challenges that Black British girls and young women will, as a consequence, inevitably encounter as they participate within it. The research findings, particularly in chapters 6 and 7, illustrate

the ways that navigating within the English education system for Black British women can be mentally and psychologically draining processes. To succeed requires additional energy which manifests into internalised pressure and mental health issues. Future research needs to explore whether there are alternative, structural responses which can facilitate the reimagining of an English education system that caters for Black girls and women in an ethical and socially just manner that validates their histories, intersectional identities and experiences in ways that enables them to thrive and win. The existence and role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the US, educating and catering for African-American students can be one starting point for future research on this topic. More specifically, future research can explore and compare 2 HBCUs, Bennett College and Spelman College- that were created to cater primarily for young women of African descent- to investigate the ways that these unique institutions educate and support Black women students in ways that enable them to thrive within wider white society. By focusing on these institutions, future research can consider the function of such institutions in adequately supporting Black British girls and women to fill the void that the current English education system is currently not addressing. It can also consider whether the establishment of HBCUs specifically for Black British girls and young women, extended to include schools and post-16 educational institutions are alternative, appropriate and feasible options for this group.

Communicating research findings to the target audience

In line with the ESRC's pathways to impact requirements and as I am aware that often, thesis research findings stay within academia and therefore do not reach

the target audience, I considered “who will benefit from this research?” and “how will they benefit from this research?” (ESRC, 2020). Due to the potential usefulness of these findings for Black British young women and girls which can contribute to ease when navigating along the English education system, and in accordance with the research aims and motivations, I thought of ways in which my research could develop into “project-specific and not generalised”, “flexible and outcome-driven” initiatives (ESRC, 2020). This led to my aims to communicate my research findings to the target audience in a number of creative ways:

- **Events and workshops** tailored to informing Black British girls and young women can be completed in collaboration with other organisations and initiatives that have similar aims of creating a socially just education system. Events and workshops will be held in culturally appropriate and accessible places like, for example the Africa Centre and the Black Cultural Archives, where the research findings will be shared and safe spaces to discuss educational experiences can be facilitated.
- **The creation of educational resources** such as pamphlets, books and mobile applications, informed by my research findings can communicate the findings to wider audiences who for example, may not be able to attend events and workshops or who wish to have further support after attendance at an event or workshop. These educational resources will act as information and a guide to enable better understandings of the education system and signposts to other useful points of assistance.
- The use of **creative arts** in the form of a **theatre production** can be another way to translate the research findings to reach the targeted audience. The use

of creative arts to share research has previously been accomplished by scholars like Erel et al (2017) and Glynn (2019) as well as organisations like BeatFreeks (2019). In a similar way that the previous scholars and organisation have translated and engaged in creatively retelling research, I hope that by doing the same with my own, it can interrupt the academic and formal nature of a thesis and communicate the findings in entertaining and comprehensible formats and styles for wider audiences.

Recommendations

The ensuing recommendations are specifically divided to advise different target groups who all have a stake in improving the learning experiences and outcomes of Black British girls and young women in the current state of the education system. The fact of these interviews and what they reveal is crucial to understandings as parents[118], communities, policy makers and academicians and it is hoped that this thesis will be read by these groups.

Black girls and young women

These recommendations are reflections from the participants in this study and come from standpoints of personal responsibility and their own experiential knowledge. I selected 3 recommendations that provide general guidance when navigating the

[118] See appendix 11 on page 353 for a toolkit for Black parents and carers

English education system which can particularly assist in maintaining good mental wellbeing:

1. *"You don't have to labour for everyone- it's not your job to save the world, it's not your job to save people, it's your job to focus on you and your education. Don't be afraid to ask for help. I think I'd give the advice to- especially any Black children that are in a predominantly white environment, is that you don't have to match them [white peers], your journey isn't their journey, your background isn't their background- it's a Jamaican saying of "puss and daag nuh have the same luck." You just have to do what's good for you and take what you've been given by God and use it to the best of your abilities."* **(Ebony, 25, British with Jamaican and Guyanese heritage)**

2. *"Remain positive and literally stay in your own lane, just because other people are let's say getting better grades than you or doing more activities than you- cos that's where it went wrong [for me]- I was like "Oh all these Law students, they are doing so much, they've got a job, they've got activities, they're studying, why can I only just study?" Don't even think about that, you know in yourself what you can do and how much you can push yourself. Just like literally stay in your own lane and focus on what you need to do and keep good, inspiring people close to you to encourage you and also be that encourager."* **(Makeda, 24, Black Caribbean)**

3. "*Not everyone is going to understand you, not everyone is going to appreciate your art or your work or your mindset. Never allow what other people think about you to change the way you think about yourself. Because there were times when I was thinking "Oh my gosh! Maybe I am not good at this, maybe I shouldn't be doing this anymore, I am not as good as I think I am!" So, I would definitely tell myself to steer clear of that doubt and just know that sometimes people are just not going to get it. They are not in your shoes, they don't understand what you are talking [about], what you are and that's fine. There is somebody out there who will, some people will appreciate it and those who it's*

supposed to get to and who it's supposed to reach, it will reach." **(Shakirah, 23, British Jamaican)**

Moving forward: Equality and diversity policy[119]

This study has highlighted some of the entrenched barriers within the education system as experienced by the Black British women graduates. In this regard, it has illustrated the role of whiteness, white privilege as well as the prevalence of intersectional institutional racism in schools and universities. Particularly, within chapter 6, I touched upon the segregated nature of educational institutions in terms of social class and/or race, and the unequal opportunities afforded to different groups of students as a consequence. Therefore, this suggests that, at present, educational institutions are big contributors to social inequality and that more needs to be done, on a structural and macro level, to redress these. However, as highlighted by Gillborn (2013: 488), "the interests of minoritised groups in general, and Black people in particular, appear to be wilfully sacrificed by reforms." In this way, policy bodies like the Office for Students (OfS), the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), UCU, Ofsted and the Department for Education to name a few, need to actively support actions that ensure that Black students as a whole, positively gain from equality and diversity reforms. This is of great importance, considering that these bodies have been formed to regulate, promote and ensure that *all* educational institutions ensure that *all* pupils and students have access to a quality, equal and fair

[119] I am aware that these recommendations are not applicable to all educational provisions as they are not homogenous. Where they can be applied to state-funded institutions, private schools and academies do not operate in the same ways as they are not obligated to deliver the national curriculum, they can recruit students as they want and implement policies they choose. However, these recommendations provide a starting point.

education. In fact, one of the Department for Education's (2014: 3) equality objectives is "supporting all children and young people, particularly the disadvantaged…to fulfil their full potential."

The exploration of this study has demonstrated that in terms of equality and diversity policy, institutional understandings of equality and diversity are not sufficient to address the unique challenges experienced by Black British girls and women. This is because this group is subject to historical, intersectional and institutional racism which is rarely acknowledged as a basis from which said policy is developed. Therefore, there is a need for equality and diversity policy to incorporate or strengthen intersectional understandings and approaches to better support this group. There is also a need for checks and balances in the system to be implemented to not only identify any issues, as my research has done, but to address them before it is too late. Initiatives like decolonising the education system, mentoring and funding need to be reviewed and expanded to cover the entire education system to ensure that Black British women students can truly gain the social, gender and racial justice they deserve in the education system.

However, these are all longstanding issues which are yet to be sufficiently addressed. The reasons for this can be understood by Bell's (1980) concept of 'interest convergence' in that "the interests of blacks in achieving racial equality have been accommodated only when they have converged with the interests of powerful whites," (Taylor 1998: 123). Frankly, addressing these issues are not in the interests of powerful whites and it can be argued that they cannot be completed within white institutions. This is because, in the words of Lorde (1984: 112) "*the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.* They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his

own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change," [emphasis in original].

By way of the considerations for future research directions and the recommendations, the final section of this chapter will share some final words to end this thesis.

Final words

At many times throughout interviews, I was inspired and motivated by the resilience, strength and perseverance that characterised and exuded from the Black British women graduates in this study as they shared with me very personal educational journeys and experiences. I end this thesis with the words of Janaya who exemplifies the unbreakable spirits of these women who I had the pleasure of speaking with. I hope that they continue to strive and reach their purposes- despite the many obstacles:

"So, there's this thing I keep hearing called a glass ceiling and I am just like really? Who does that stop? It's not stopping me. It may exist but you really think I am gonna come this far to let somebody say that because you are Black you can't get past a certain level, or because you are a woman or because you are from {names area} really? No! But I have seen it, I have seen certain people say "Oooh, I didn't expect you to be Black", "I didn't expect you to have…" "Oooh you're from {names area} oooh I never saw that coming." That's your business, that's your perception of what you thought I was gonna be and I can't alter that, I can only be me and prove you wrong." **(Janaya, 22, Caribbean)**

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Recruitment Poster

The photo used in the poster was taken from Pinterest (2017)

Appendix 2: Recruitment email

Dear *Women in the City Afro-Caribbean Network (WCAN), the National Black Women's Network (NBWN), the Black Women's Forum UK and the Black Women of Birmingham organisation,* the Black and Asian Studies Association and the Network for Black & Asian Professionals **[to delete as appropriate]**

My name is April-Louise and under the supervision of XXXXX, I am doing my PhD in the School of Education at the University of Birmingham. I would be grateful if you could send the below message on my behalf to your mailing lists?

Many thanks,

April-Louise

Dear all members of *Women in the City Afro-Caribbean Network (WCAN), the National Black Women's Network (NBWN), the Black Women's Forum UK and the Black Women of Birmingham organisation,* the Black and Asian Studies Association and the Network for Black & Asian Professionals, **[to delete as appropriate]**

My name is April-Louise and I am completing a PhD in the School of Education at the University of Birmingham.

My thesis is exploring the educational journeys and experiences of Black British female graduates. In particular, I would like to find out about experiences of the education system (from primary school to university), the key influences within educational journeys (teachers, family, extended networks) and how decisions were made at different stages throughout.

I am looking for Black (those of Black African and/or Black Caribbean Descent) British female graduates to participate in my study. Ideally, they will have completed their schooling and undergraduate studies within the English education system and graduated between 2014-2017 from an English university,

I will be conducting interviews which will last about an hour and they will take place at a mutually agreed time and place. There may be follow up interviews if required.

Anonymity will be guaranteed, and interviews will be carried out in confidence where pseudonyms will replace real names and any other identifying details. This will also be the case in the final research piece.

For further information or to take part, please email me: XXXXXX@student.bham.ac.uk by **Thursday 15th June 2017**.

Please include within the email:

1. The university you graduated from
2. The year you graduated

Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

Please share this email amongst others who fit the requirements. Thank you so much.

Kind Regards,

April-Louise

Appendix 3: Participant biographies

These were all written by the participants.

1. **Grace** is a proud second-generation Nigerian born in England whilst very much in touch with her Yoruba heritage. She comes from a lower middle-class family and her parents always worked hard to provide the best for herself and her siblings. She was raised a catholic as this was her father's religion and went to a Roman Catholic primary school. Gaining a secondary school place was not easy however she was very grateful for having the chance to go to boarding school as they were the best years of her life so far. Her state boarding school was an international language school and she gained a high grade in her German GCSE- two years early in year 9- and carried forward her studies with this for the duration of her time in school. She studied the International Baccalaureate as opposed to A-Levels which was challenging however a great benefit in creating a well-rounded intellectual. Aspiring to be a doctor, unfortunately she did not get into medical school and took a gap year in order to figure out her future plans. She did end up studying psychology which was not something she enjoyed or something that contributed to her lifelong plans. However, she felt it important to gain a degree of some sorts. Feeling close to dropping out several times, she pushed through and graduated albeit not with the best grade she was capable of.

2. **Camille** is a young woman, born from two immigrant parents in Angola and raised in England. She grew up in a working-class area. She gained places at local primary, secondary and sixth form colleges in the South East. After gaining good A-Level results, she gained a place at university to study performing arts (film, television and stage). By the end of the degree she knew that arts marketing was her number one area of interest. She wanted to work in an area that analyses audiences and their interests. She is now working full time in the performing arts industry as a marketing and communications assistant near the capital. She attends various shows, events and plays outside of her job as theatre has become a big part of her life. Her educational journey was a positive experience, especially her degree as it gave her confidence as well as knowledge.

3. **Kemi** is a young female, British Nigerian with a working-class background. Her educational journey has been shaped by attending faith-based state schools since reception with the only exception being her university. She had to move schools, following a family move to Hertfordshire in 2004. Following on from getting good

grades at GCSE level, Kemi went to study A-Levels at a grammar school in a London suburb. Although she did not achieve the required grades for her 1st and 2nd university choices she was offered a place at a pre-1992 university to study politics and international relations. She is now working as an Event Manager for a global media brand.

4. **Adeola** is a second-generation British Nigerian from a lower middle-class background. Her educational background started at a multicultural state primary school in South East London. After her family moved, she attended a voluntary aided Church of England school. Adeola then went to attend an all-girls private school in South East London and finished her A-Levels in a grammar school in Surrey. Adeola then went on to attend a specialist medical university – whilst there she took a year out to earn another degree in physiology. Currently she is working as a doctor and is in the process of becoming a consultant in diabetes and endocrinology.

5. **La'Shay** is the founder of a creative platform exploring self-love, self-discovery and personal growth; and is also a writer and filmmaker that creates content for the purposes of self-expression, healing and greater self-awareness for women of colour. She draws on her own (often challenging) experiences, learnings and self-discoveries to inform her work. La'Shay believes creativity is a beautiful way to transmute pain and take what may be perceived as a challenging experience and transform it into wisdom and inspiration. La'Shay has a passion for well-being and education.

6. **Deja** is British born with a very strong Caribbean heritage. She has always been intrigued by culture and identity. Having experienced different environments throughout her education, Deja is adept at remaining authentic whilst integrating into diverse contexts, whether personally or professionally. From a young age, education was often an escape from home-life challenges and became the foundation from which she evolved as a dynamic individual. Starting in a local private primary school, with a predominantly Black student body, and embedded Christian beliefs which occasionally clashed with her own denomination at the time, then successfully transitioning to an all-girls grammar school in an affluent area, being one of only ten Black students, Deja was very used to being what many would call 'in the minority'. However, Deja has never been afraid to stand-out, given her vibrant personality and journey from student to entrepreneur. Whilst studying international business and Spanish at university in her

home city in the West Midlands, Deja jumped at the opportunity to live and work in Mexico City for 12 months to further grow and transform. Deja is now self-employed and describes herself as a creative-analytic, investing in young people globally who will lead the future.

7. **Dionne** is a second-generation, British/Jamaican woman who has difficulty identifying with a social class but aligns most closely with working-class. She had a 'normal' educational journey beginning with going to a primary school in the South London. Then a state secondary school also in the same area, which at the time had a reputation of being 'bad'. She did not go to college but instead completed an NVQ Level 2 in business administration, which gave her the A-C GCSE equivalent grades that she did not achieve in secondary school. She never had an issue of capability but was easily distracted and did not put in the concentration required to get the A's-B's that she was predicted. Dionne returned to education by completing a Pre-Access course and then an Access course in social sciences, part of the process was to complete a UCAS application despite not wanting to go to university, as she associated the process with concentration that she found difficult to master and didn't want to accumulate debt. She went on to achieve a 2:1 in a joint honours degree. She returned to study two years later and is now in the process of completing an MPhil/PhD looking at the student experiences in UK higher education institutions and the labour market outcomes of Black graduates.

8. Growing up British Ghanaian and having had a headteacher for a grandmother, the importance of pursuing education was a reality **Joy** could not escape. With a somewhat turbulent upbringing leading to her attending four different primary schools after relocating four times in London and the South East, the after-effects caused by such disruption meant she saw schooling as a constant. Upon successfully passing the 11+ entrance exams, Joy went on to attend a grammar school where she remained to complete her A-Level studies and then went on to graduate with a MSci in business and economy of contemporary China at an elite university. Her higher education experience gave her the opportunity to study a year abroad in China, where she also volunteered in primary schools and saw first-hand the differences present between the British and Chinese education system, sparking her interest in pedagogy. Currently, Joy works in admissions in a higher education institution in the UK. Her role consists of analysing entry statistics, broadening her insights regarding the impacts of different variables in one's pursuit of higher education.

9. **Rachel** was born in America to an African-American mother and Israeli father. At age 3 she moved to England with her twin brother and father due to her parent's divorce. Due to her family's academic background Rachel was routinely exposed to unique educational experiences, such as spending 3 months on a voyage around the world thanks to a multi-country study abroad program on a ship. As a child Rachel went to top-performing state schools in the UK. Her primary school not only managed to provide great education but had a diverse student body. The class background of students varied greatly, and there were also a number of BAME students. The secondary school Rachel then went to attend was starkly different. Though the education was among the top in the county, the student body was very homogeneous. Most students were white and upper-middle class, leaving Rachel's status as a middle-class Black Jewish immigrant very obvious. Rachel completed her A-Levels at a sixth form similar to her secondary school, and her good results allowed her to study anthropology at a pre-1992 university. Rachel chose Anthropology as it allowed her to study a variety of topics under the umbrella of studying humans. Rachel has greatly enjoyed studying anthropology and is studying for a master's and PhD in biological anthropology. Rachel's unique experiences and background has led her to decide to study inequality, how it presents itself in society and how it affects the health and behaviour of disenfranchised individuals.

10. **Jumoke** is a second-generation, British Nigerian woman from a middle-class background. Growing up in a predominantly white, middle-class area, Jumoke faced her fair share of challenges when it came to race, culture, identity and sense of belonging. Her educational journey began at a small, private school, in a rural part of the UK. Jumoke went on to attend a selective, grammar school, where she completed her GCSEs and sixth form. After completing the International Baccalaureate Diploma during her two years at sixth form, she gained a place at university to study law. She became interested in international development and human rights and went on to pursue her master's degree in international development law and Human Rights. She now works in International Affairs, using her knowledge and interest in international relations, diplomacy and international development.

11. **Takara** is a British-born West Indian of Trinidadian and Kittitian descent, with a lower middle-class background. Takara attended both private and state primary schools in

the South East before moving to the West Midlands aged 7 where she stayed for the majority of her school life. Takara attended the local primary school on her estate, before following her elder brother to a secondary school within an industrial 'working-class' area. Though arguably multicultural the school was, predominantly South Asian. As this school did not have a sixth form, Takara moved institution to complete her A-Levels. After attaining decent grades, Takara went to university to study psychology with sociology and then gained a masters in forensic psychology. Takara is currently studying and working as a trainee child wellbeing practitioner whilst studying part-time, for a post graduate certificate in child wellbeing. Takara hopes to use her experience in mental health, working with children, and background in forensic psychology to complete a doctorate in forensic psychology whilst working within a youth offending service in the coming years.

12. **Chanel** is a Black British Caribbean woman who was born and raised in the South East from a working-class family. She had her primary, secondary and sixth form education all local to her home. She attended a Church of England school from nursery to year 6. She then went on to her first-choice state secondary school, a girls' school where she exceeded well in her GCSEs. As her secondary school did not have a sixth form Chanel went elsewhere to study at a sixth form as she did not want to attend a large college but wanted to study in an educational environment where she could get support and build personal relationships with her teachers. After achieving 3 A-Levels in sixth form she went on to study criminology and sociology at a pre-1992 university. Though enjoying her studies, she did not take up a career relating to her course. She is now an international commercial planner for a British multinational retailer. She has been working for the company for 4 years doing various roles and working with many stakeholders in the business which she enjoys.

13. **Yasmin** is a lower middle-class British woman, originally from Jamaica. Her education in England started at age 8, which meant she had to adapt to the cultural shift and the new challenges in the education system, in comparison to that in Jamaica, as well as understanding what it meant to be 'British'. She identifies as being British, after spending more than half of her life (17 years) in England. She attended 2 primary schools, before moving on to a Church of England state secondary school. Despite attending a state school and a sixth-form college, Yasmin achieved good GCSE and A-Levels, which prompted her to study a psychology BSc at a pre-1992 university. She

then went on to do her MSc in clinical mental health sciences at an elite university. She is now working as a forensic mental health practitioner within the criminal justice sector.

14. **Afua** is a young Ghanaian woman born and bred in North London. Her parents, both in manual employment, migrated to England in the 1980s to begin what they believed as a 'better life' for themselves and their family to come. The second of two children, Afua attended her local Church of England school from nursery right through to year 6. She then completed her secondary education at a voluntary aided co-educational state Church of England school specialising in mathematics, computing and engineering in the neighbouring catchment area. Having previously been exposed to children from predominantly African and Caribbean backgrounds, she continued her A-Levels at a multicultural sixth form college in the East of the capital which lead her to her pre-1992 university where she attained a degree in criminology and sociology and an MA in international social policy. Now working in the Civil Service, she uses her skills and knowledge to effectively communicate the government's policies in building stronger communities.

15. **Rochelle** is English born with Jamaican heritage. She has an intriguing educational background and went to a catholic state primary school in London and a state secondary school in Surrey. She then attended college where she successfully completed her A-Levels. However, Rochelle decided to further enhance her studies by completing an exchange programme overseas in Spain and France which contributed to her undergraduate degree. During the years she spent overseas, she became trilingual, working in schools, universities and start-up firms. In 2015, she graduated with a First Class BA hons degree in international business and spanish. Moreover, Rochelle gained a TEFL qualification which led to her starting an independent teaching business in 2016. She currently manages her online business whilst working as a manager at a charity that supports individuals with sight loss. She has taken a keen interest into the visually impaired community and has been recently awarded an OCN qualification in understanding sensory impairment.

16. **Beverley** is a Nigerian born young woman who has spent most of her life in England. She embarked on a different educational journey to others. After successfully completing her GCSEs she decided to take an apprenticeship offer rather than the college/sixth form route, which were the only options being offered at her school at the time. This experience provided her with both education via NVQ Level 2 & 3

qualifications, and experience in the working world. She was able to experience at an early age what an office job entailed and how to manage her learning in that environment. University was always a goal for her. Fortunately, the Apprenticeship came with a Connections Adviser who informed her that her NVQ Level 3 qualification would get her on to an HND and Foundation Degree course. After researching online, she was able to narrow her choices to 3 universities who offered an HND business finance course with an option to top-up to a BA Hons business in the third year. She gained a place at her pre-1992 university and after three years she was able to gain both an HND business finance and a BA Hons in business.

17. **Claudia** is a second-generation British Ghanaian woman. Having grown up in South London, she attended state catholic primary school. She excelled in school and with support from her parents; she attended a top girl's private school. Her parents initially paid full fees, but she was then able to be supported with a full bursary from year 9 onwards. She remained at the school throughout her secondary and sixth form education. Claudia achieved good A-Levels and went on to study religion and theology at an elite university. She enjoyed her university experience and got heavily involved in students' societies. Whilst completing her masters in international relations she was elected into a student officer role in her student union and was the first Black woman to hold that position and the first to hold the position for two years. She became deeply passionate about education and worked on several campaigns including bringing £300,000 worth of masters bursaries to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. She now works as a programme manager at a small education charity running programmes to widen the ambitions and opportunities with disadvantaged schools across England. She also acts as a mentor and weekly mentors a 10-year-old girl to become more resilient at a key point in her development.

18. **Makeda** is a British, Grenadian young woman with a lower middle-class background. She went through the 'traditional' educational route where she went to a Catholic state primary school. The majority of her class were Black and Asian with the minority being Caucasian. After attending primary school, she went to a Catholic state secondary school in West London where she completed her GCSEs. In order to experience education outside of her comfort zone, Makeda decided not to stay on at her secondary school's sixth form and instead attended a college to complete her A- Levels at a more diverse college in Greater London. This is where Makeda's independence began and where reality started; where teachers did not force students to complete homework;

where you had to manage your own time and be responsible for 'you.' After completing her A-Levels, Makeda gained a place to study law at university which she studied for three years. Currently, Makeda is working for the government, leading on projects to reduce child trafficking in and out of the UK.

19. **Sophia** is a British Jamaican and Nigerian female from a working-class background. She attended mostly state educational institutions comprised of primary, secondary and further education, where she attained her GCSEs and A-Levels. Despite her predicted grades, Sophia did not attain the grades she wanted for her A-Levels and decided to stay in sixth form for an extra year and achieved 3 As. She went on to pursue a degree in Politics and International Relations at a pre-1992 university then a masters in international relations at an elite university. During her studies, she volunteered as a teacher in Kenya, Nairobi and completed a month internship in China.

20. **Ebony** is a second-generation British Jamaican and Guyanese young woman from a lower-middle class background. Throughout her educational experiences, Ebony attended both state and private schools within Birmingham. From the age of 11-16, Ebony attended a selective all-girls private school; leaving to attend a diverse further educational sixth- form college at 16. After obtaining good A-Level grades Ebony went on to study psychology at an elite university; later changing her course to sociology and criminology. Subsequently, after graduating with a 2:1, in 2017 Ebony went on to obtain her MSc degree in International Development (Poverty, Inequality and Development) with a Distinction. For her masters dissertation, Ebony focused upon poverty reduction and social inclusion within international development; which included independent research in Jamaica. Now working within policy, Ebony's research interests include, socio-economic inequality, gender, neo-colonialism and global policy. Ebony was drawn to April-Louise's research, due to her own personal experiences with the English education system, as well as her interest in how different life experiences have shaped the current Black British identity.

21. **Halima** was born and partly raised in Germany and then moved to England in her pre-teens. She comes from a North and West African household where the west African heritage was much more present in her life. Halima's educational journey has not been easy. From an early age, both teachers and her parent had to intervene to support her in her education, both signing homework booklets to private tutoring. Later she found

school a bit easier and she thoroughly enjoyed both secondary school and sixth form college. Getting involved in extracurricular activities to coming in early and staying behind after school to get extra work done. After two intense years at sixth form college Halima was accepted into her first-choice university where she graduated having studied sociology.

22. **Shakirah** is a third-generation British-Jamaican woman from Birmingham with a working-class background. The youngest of three girls, her educational experiences have been a journey of following in her sisters' footsteps whilst trying to create a new pathway for herself. Firstly, she attended the same Catholic state primary school as her sisters, once she had completed her primary school education, she went on to join her older sisters at a state secondary school whose students were predominantly white. After two years enduring harsh discrimination from the schoolteachers her parents decided to move her to a more multicultural state secondary school of her choosing where she thrived and went on to achieve the highest GCSE grades in her year. Deciding to leave school after year 11 Shakirah went on to study fashion and textiles at college where she once again achieved the highest grades in her year. After gaining her fashion and textiles qualification she continued her passion for the creative arts and studied a BA hons in fashion design at university. She is now working within the fashion industry as a freelance designer and is building her own menswear designer brand with the hopes of setting up her own business in the near future.

23. **Estelle** is a second-generation, Jamaican and Ghanaian, British woman from Birmingham. She attended a diverse catholic primary school and then an all-girls grammar school until the age of 18. Estelle completed A-Levels in maths and physics, before going on to study engineering at university. She obtained a masters in mechanical engineering with an industrial year and is now working in Engineering.

24. **Simone** is a fourth-generation Jamaican British woman. Growing up in the West London, she attended two primary schools in the borough she lived and then attended a state secondary school. After completing A-Levels at her school's sixth form, Simone earned a place at an elite university, to read English literature. She graduated with First Class honours as the winner of the prize for the highest dissertation grade on her course**.** She is now working as a social media officer in higher education.

25. Janaya is a writer, broadcaster and educator hailing from Birmingham. She is a third-generation Black British Caribbean woman who grew up in a working-class background. Her passion for writing and literary studies started from her time at her primary school and was advanced by secondary and further education. However, during her time at university studying English, she became conscious of the lack of ethnic minority representation on the syllabus. Her work, both literary and educationally expresses her plight to help women of colour's stories to be heard and studied across the UK.

Appendix 4: Interview guide

Introduce myself and thank participant for coming.
Provide participant with information sheet and consent form.
Remind the participant that pseudonyms will be used in the research, the interview will be recorded and that they are able to stop the interview at any time.

Personal history

1. To start, could you tell me a little bit about yourself?
    a. Age
    b. What are you currently doing for work? [do you enjoy it? Is this your first job since graduating? Is it what you planned to do?
    c. What would you describe your ethnic/cultural background as? [any additional languages spoken/understood?]
    d. What would you describe your social class as? Why?
    e. Would you say you are religious or spiritual?
    f. Tell me about your parents [birthplace, education, occupation, are they still together? would you say you are close to them?]
    g. How many siblings do you have? [are you the oldest/youngest? are you close? what was it like growing up?]

Educational journeys/experiences (schooling/college/sixth form)

2. Can you tell me about your education? I appreciate it may be a little while ago now, but starting with:

a. **Primary schooling** [type of school, fee-paying, proximity to home, friends, how many black students were there? favourite subjects/teachers, did you have any black teachers? participation in extra-curricular activities? Did you get any awards or prizes? Did you enjoy school? How did you prepare for secondary schooling?]
b. **Secondary schooling** [type of school, co-ed/ single sex, why did you choose yo go there? what was the selection criteria? fee-paying? Proximity to home, friendship group, participation in extra-curricular activities, did you have any black teachers? how many black students were there? did you get any awards, prizes? Did you have any special roles [prefect]? Did you enjoy school? What subjects did you choose for GCSEs? How would you say you performed academically?]
c. **Sixth form/FE college** [where did you go to sixth form/college? why did you choose there? what was the selection criteria like? fee-paying? Proximity to home, friendship group, participation in extra-curricular activities, did you have a job? Did you get Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)? If so, what did you spend it on? Did you do A-Levels, IB or BTEC? How would you say you performed academically?]

3. How would you summarise your schooling and college/sixth form experiences? Would you say your experiences are mostly positive or negative? How do you think your schooling and sixth form/college experiences shaped your views, choices and experiences as you continued within the education system?
4. Looking back, what or who would you say were some of the key influences or people throughout your schooling experiences and journeys? [family, teachers, faith]
5. Were there any stages where you relied heavily on these influences or people more than others? Why?

Educational journeys/experiences (University)

1. Can you tell me about your university experience? [Did you go straight to university from 6th form/ college? Which university, degree subject, reasons for choice? Did you use student

finance? Did you do a year abroad/ a placement year as part of your degree course? Did you have a part-time job alongside your studies? Why or Why not? Did you receive any awards?]
2. Did you enjoy studying your degree course? Why/Why not?
3. How did you feel at different stages, for instance at the end of first year vs. second year vs. final year? Why?
4. Did you participate in any student societies, extra-curricular activities, religious activities?
5. Are there any lecturers or university staff you can recall that you particularly liked or disliked? Why?
6. Did you have any Black lecturers? Were there many other Black students on your course/in your year/in the wider university? What about Black females?
7. What were your friendship group like? How diverse was it? Do you still talk to them now?
8. How would you say you performed academically? [degree classification achieved- were you happy with that?]
9. Can you remember any challenges you faced during your time at university? How did you overcome them?
10. How would you summarise your university experiences? Would you say your experiences are mostly positive or negative?

Reflections and key influences within educational experiences and journeys

1. What advice would you give to your younger self or someone who had a similar educational experience and journey to yourself?
2. Would you change anything about it? [structures, support, choices]
3. Bringing your parents back into the conversation, how did they view education, and do you think that shaped your views and how you engaged with your education in any way?
4. If you have any siblings, do you feel they had similar educational experiences and journeys to yourself? Why/Why not?
5. Did you have other sources of support throughout your educational experiences and journeys, aside from your parents, who you could go to? Tell me a bit about these.

General/identity position

1. You mentioned your ethnic/cultural background at the start, do you think that shaped your educational experiences and journey in any way?
2. Do you think your ethnic/cultural background made your educational experiences and journey different to Black students from other ethnic/cultural backgrounds to yourself? Why/Why not?
3. Do you think that there are parallels regarding the educational experiences and journeys of Black British students? Why/Why not?
4. How would you say you were viewed by other Black students?
5. How do you think this changes when considering Black British females specifically?
6. You described your social class positioning earlier, do you think this influenced your educational experiences and journeys in any way? How/why?
7. What are your thoughts on the English education system as a whole? Do you think anything should be changed/improved?

We've now come to an end. As you know I'm interested in your experiences and journey as a Black female in the education system. Is there anything you would like to add to what we've discussed?

Thank participant once again for participating and let them know about what will happen next. Also let them know that they will be able to read the final dissertation if they wish.

Appendix 5: Ethical approval

Dear Dr XXXX and Dr XXXX

Re: "The educational journeys and experiences of Black British female graduates" Application for amendment ERN_16-0411A

Thank you for the above application for amendment, which was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I can confirm that this amendment now has full ethical approval.

I would like to remind you that any substantive changes to the nature of the study as now amended, and/or any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly bought to the Committee's attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review. A revised amendment application form is now available at https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx . Please ensure this form is submitted for any further amendments.

Please also ensure that the relevant requirements within the University's Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (available athttps://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx) are adhered to and referred to in any future applications for ethical review. It is now a requirement on the revised application form (https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx) to confirm that this guidance has been consulted and is understood, and that it has been taken into account when completing your application for ethical review.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University's guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University's H&S Unit at healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

If you require a hard copy of this correspondence, please let me know.

Kind regards

XXXXXXXX
Research Ethics Officer
Aston Webb Building
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston B15 2TT

Appendix 6: Information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

Title of proposed study

The educational journeys and experiences of Black British female graduates

Description of proposed study

Your interview forms part of the research for my PhD thesis in the School of Education, University of Birmingham. I am interested in the educational experiences and journeys of Black British female graduates. I hope to gain an insight from you about the strategies you used to help you achieve educational success and what or who helped you make decisions along the way.

Invitation to participate and explanation of what participation entails

You have been invited, as a Black female graduate, to share your educational experiences and journeys in an interview with me (April-Louise).

Interviews will last about an hour and they will take place at a mutually agreed time and place in London or Birmingham.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

You may be both positively and negatively affected depending on the nature of your educational experiences and journeys. Below are some services to provide additional support if needed. Please feel free to ask any questions if you desire more clarity in terms of what is expected of you.

Support services to contact if needed

Support Line: http://www.supportline.org.uk , tel: 0170 876 5200
The Samaritans: http://www.samaritans.org , tel: 116 123
SANE: http://www.sane.org.uk , tel: 0300 304 7000

Confidentiality/anonymity and data security

All information shared during the course of the interviews will be treated as confidential. Your name and the names of any identifiable person or institution will be changed to protect your anonymity.

With your consent the interview will be recorded. All files will be password protected and stored on a secure, encrypted memory stick. In line with the requirements at the University of Birmingham, data from interviews will also be stored in the 'Research Data Store (RDS)' which will allow restricted and secure access to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants for a minimum of 10 years after the research has been completed.

Withdrawal

You have the right to withdraw from the research and if you wish to do so, please contact me before December 2017.

Results of the study

The findings from this study will contribute towards a PhD thesis which documents the educational journeys and experiences of Black female students within the English education system. In addition, the findings may be used to provide recommendations in the education sector to contribute to debates about Black females in the English education system.

Who is funding the study?

This research is funded by an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) studentship.

Contact details

Researcher:

April-Louise Pennant
ESRC Doctoral Researcher
School of Education
University of Birmingham
XXXX@student.bham.ac.uk

Supervisor:

Dr Dina Kiwan,
School of Education
University of Birmingham
XXXX@bham.ac.uk

Appendix 7: Consent form

CONSENT FORM

Name of Researcher
April-Louise Pennant

Proposed study
The Educational journeys and experiences of Black British female graduates

This research project is concerned with the educational journeys and experiences of Black female graduates. It forms part of my PhD research which I am carrying out at as a student of the School of Education, University of Birmingham.

Fair Processing Statement
The information which you supply and that which may be collected as part of the research project will be entered into a filing system or database and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in the project. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit purposes. By supplying this information you are agreeing to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. No identifiable personal data will be published.

Please tick box

Statements of understanding/consent

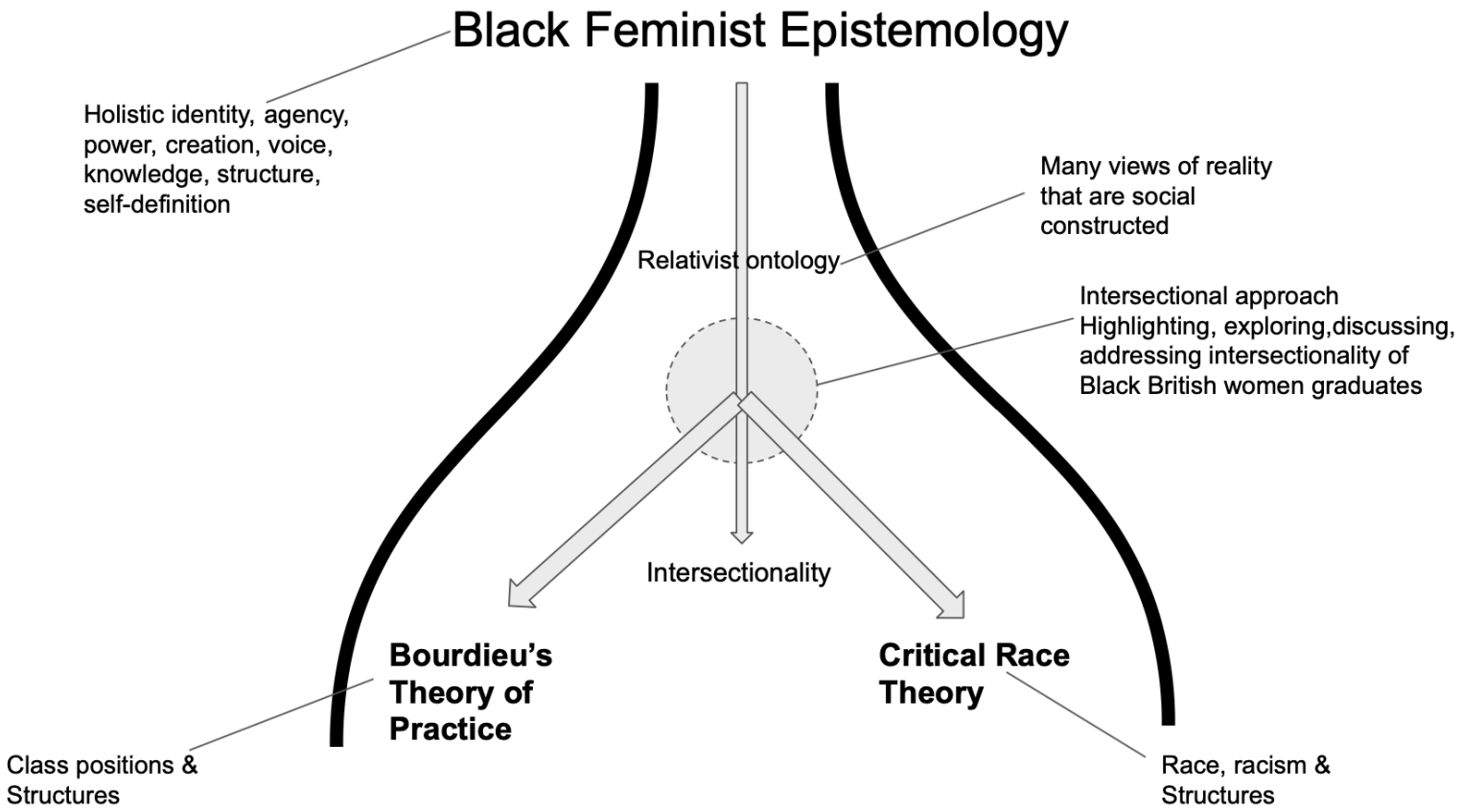
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet for this study and I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I understand that my name and any information that might identify me will not be used in the publication of any materials to emerge from this research. A pseudonym will replace my name ☐
3. I give permission for my interview to be audio-recorded ☐
4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up to three months after this interview, without giving any reason. If I withdraw my data will be removed from the study and will be deleted. ☐
5. I understand that my personal data will be processed for the purposes detailed above, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. ☐
6. I give permission for the data from my interview to be used within the researcher's PhD thesis and other publications ☐
7. Based upon the above, I agree to take part in this study. ☐

8. I am interested in receiving information and invitations concerning the findings of the study. ☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

One copy will be given to the participant and the original to be kept in the file of the researcher.

Appendix 8: Illustration of visual representation of the ontological, epistemological and theoretical frameworks



The diagram above demonstrates the framework underpinning this research which has been detailed in chapters 2 and 4. The research is grounded in Black feminist epistemology as it is knowledge created by Black women, centring the experiences of other Black women. By incorporating a relativist ontology, which advocates that there are many views of reality, it complements Black Feminist epistemology to share the stories of a diverse range of participants. In order to foreground the importance of intersectionality within the participants experiences- particularly the role of class, cultural background & ethnicity, race and gender- an intersectional approach was chosen, which brought together the distinct frameworks of Critical Race Theory and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice together and within the context of Black Feminist epistemology. The employment of theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu's theory of Practice alongside Critical Race Theory, assisted in providing a sociological perspective when interpreting the data and articulating specific elements of the Black British women graduates' identities and how these operated within the structures of the (white) education system.

Appendix 9: Reflections on psycho, social and emotional challenges

Here, I turn my attention to reflect upon the personal challenges I encountered when conducting this research. These considerations have previously been articulated and characterised as 'racial battle fatigue' (Smith et al, 2011; Smith et al, 2016; Acuff, 2018; Corbin et al, 2018; Gorski, 2019) as Black educators and academics navigate hostile white spaces and/or conduct race-centred research (Maylor, 2009; Rollock, 2013; Hughey et al, 2015; Combs, 2017; Doharty, 2019). I began this thesis by situating myself and my own educational experiences and journey in chapter 1. This was crucial as this research is grounded in Black feminist epistemology and doing so was a way to both explain the ontological stance, but also to express the research motivations. I feel that it is important and necessary to share how throughout this study, I engaged upon my own personal journey which led to many psycho, social and emotional challenges (Rollock, 2013). In reflecting on this, I am, as Doharty (2019: 7) asserts, engaging in "strategic emotionality" in that I am "deliberate[ly] and conscious[ly]…theoris[ing] [my] emotions as part of [my] race research." My research journey and thus the triggers were prompted by my intensive readings of studies and statistics; interviewing the Black women participants; my analysis, engagement and interpretation of all the research data, and the assembling of all of these strands into one comprehensive, academic document. These processes led to the gaining of a heightened awareness of how deep and established the inequalities faced by Black British women are (Leonardo, 2013). As a Black woman myself, I often questioned my own position due to my monumental feat of literally 'beating the odds' and occupying a space where others like myself have largely been unable to. I expressed this within the following extract from my research journal:

September 2018

TRIGGERS

I really wanted to reflect on how my emotions have been triggered recently- to the point where I am actually crying over the negative statistics and previous research which firmly places Black students 'at the bottom' and one of the most disadvantaged students in the UK. Mind you, these are things that I have always known, and which prompted me to carry out my research, but for some reason, of late, it has really started to get to me. There were two previous occasions when this happened to me- the first was when I was writing my literature review and I had to give some historical grounding which meant I had to research and read books about Black history which included colonisation and all of that. It made me really sad due to the conditions back then and how the system was manipulated and structured to keep Black people at a

disadvantage and how evident these legacies currently are. The other time was during interviews where the Black women kept expressing their awareness that as Black women, they were at the bottom of society's 'totem pole'. Again, while I have always known this, to have basically 25 other women utter this reality made me so upset.

They do say that this kind of research can be very emotional and especially because I am a Black woman and therefore, I am basically shining a light on my reality while also trying to say- but there is more and positive things going on here. It also reminds me about the privileged position I am in where I am able to conduct such research- in spite of the fact that it is within limits. Sometimes you do think "what is the point when so much is stacked against you?" "How much can your research actually do to change anything?" But then I remember how I felt when I first saw Heidi Mirza's research and the fact that Black girls could be the subject of research shining a positive light upon them. It actually changed my life and motivated me. I also felt this feeling of power and awe when I discovered Black feminism and CRT and even Bourdieu's theories. It's like once you can put into words how things work; it can ease the confusion you have navigating this confusing, unfair world.

As is evident from the previous account from my research journal, I document some of the psycho, social and emotional challenges that I felt when conducting this study. In many ways my research journal, as discussed in chapter 4, became an important tool that enabled me to release these thoughts and feelings that impacted me a great deal. Other ways that I was able to gain emotional support was through talking to family, my supervisors, friends and fellow PhD researchers engaged in similar research. Additionally, my participation in a Black Feminist summer school in Brazil meant that I was able to see my research as part of a bigger and very needed global project to validate overlooked and disadvantaged groups and their experiences. Therefore, I knew that I needed to continue and complete it. However, my research experiences made me consider the ramifications and implications of conducting this kind of research. If the psycho, emotional and social toll is too great, how will the academy support researchers who undertake studies within this area?

By completing this research, I have certainly developed myself intellectually and therefore, my situation has changed in terms of my understanding of self, my relatively privileged position and the sense of duty I feel in bringing Black British women's educational journeys and experiences to the forefront. Yet, this journey has not been easy, and I have had to contend with additional psycho, social and emotional challenges, alongside doing a PhD, which other researchers focusing on other topics may not have to encounter. I bring attention to this because this kind of research is crucial and therefore there needs to be some rethinking

in terms of how to make this a less emotionally draining process. I reflected upon these considerations also in my research journal:

> *A PhD is hard and makes you delve into the heart of knowledge but also the heart of yourself. It breaks you down, pushes you to your limits, changes your perceptions or cements them. It symbolises power- especially when the topic is quite personal, because you are actively challenging everything you have been taught to provide another perspective. You are like a lawyer, making a compelling argument to a judge and you need to find sources to back it up- and when that is very limited, you need to go beyond the standard areas and find other ways to back up what you are saying and what you have found.*

It is hoped that this thesis can generate serious consideration about this research area and how to better support doctoral researchers and academics choosing to enter it.

Appendix 10: Detailed descriptions of the 5 main Black women depictions as outlined by Collins (2000)

Mammy- "the faithful, obedient domestic servant. Created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained to explain Black women's long-standing restriction to domestic service, the mammy image represents the normative yardstick used to evaluate all Black women's behaviour. By loving and nurturing and caring for her White children and "family" better than her own, the mammy symbolises the dominant group's perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power," (Collins, 2000: 72).

Matriarch- "the matriarch symbolises the mother figure in Black homes…women who failed to fulfil their traditional "womanly" duties at home…spending too much time away from home, these working mothers ostensibly could not properly supervise their children and thus were major contributing factors to their children's failure at school. As overly aggressive, unfeminine women, Black matriarchs allegedly emasculated their lovers and husbands…From the dominant group's perspective, the matriarch represented the failed mammy, a negative stigma to be applied to African-American women who dared reject the image of submissive, hardworking servant," (Collins, 2000: 75).

Welfare mother- "a class-specific, controlling image developed for poor, working-class Black women who make use of the social welfare benefits to which they are entitled to by law…Essentially an updated version of the breeder woman image created during slavery, this image provides an ideological justification for efforts to harness Black women's fertility to the needs of a changing political economy," (Collins, 2000: 78).

Black lady- "middle-class professional Black women who represent[s] a modern version of the politics of respectability…this image may not appear to be a controlling image, merely a benign one…yet the image of the Black lady builds upon prior images of Black womanhood in many ways…this image seems to be yet another version of the modern mammy, namely, the hardworking Black woman professional who works twice as hard as everyone else…Highly educated Black ladies are deemed to be *too* assertive- that's why they cannot get men to marry them," (Collins, 2000: 80-81).

Jezebel- "relegates all black women to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men typically reported by Black slave women…a racialised, gendered symbol of deviant female sexuality…a woman whose sexual appetites are, at best inappropriate and, at worst, insatiable, it becomes a short step to imagine her as a "freak". (Collins, 2000: 81-83).

Appendix 11: ‘Black’ with a capital ‘B’

I wish to bring attention to my deliberate use of ‘Black’ with a capital ‘B’ throughout this thesis. In 1975, a comment sent to the *American Psychologist* Journal argued for the ‘Capital B for Black’ when the commenter explains that “no rule of grammar requires a capital J for Jew in contrast to another group of people in lowercase…[and therefore] I choose Black as both an affiliation and an identity; it deserves a capital B on both counts,” (p. 181). This reader is not only highlighting the way power is exercised in discourse to depreciate particular groups, but also the fact that the term ‘Black’- which I have shown has been reclaimed by a particular set of people- namely those of African descent and therefore transforms the word into more than just a colour. In a more recent article in *The New York Times*, Tharps (2014) also reasserts this stance for the use of a capital ‘B’ in ‘Black’ as she asserts that “when speaking of a culture, ethnicity or group of people, the name should be capitalised. ‘Black’ with a capital ‘B’ refers to people of the African diaspora. Lowercase black is simply a colour.”

Furthermore, within a linguistic context, what I am doing with the use of a capital ‘B’ in ‘Black’ is called prescription which is described by Millar (1995: 187) as “the conscious attempt by language users to control or regulate the language use of others [or self-] for the purpose of enforcing perceived norms or of promoting innovations.” As evidenced, I am conscious of the diversity amongst the Black group and do not wish to diminish the diversity and therefore it is used as a tool to distinguish the African diaspora in which nuances such as gender, social class and ethnic and cultural identity have been pulled out further. Ang-Lygate (1997: 171) notes that she too practices a similar differentiation within her writing on similar topics. Simply put, by using a capital ‘B’ in Black, I wish to reclaim some power back for historically oppressed groups of people, honour past struggles and to represent the many cultures and ethnicities which ‘Black’ has become a marker to signify.

Appendix 12: Black parents' and carers' toolkit

Throughout this study, the significant role and active involvement of parents is evident within the participants' educational journeys and experiences. In the introductory chapter, I also expressed how the engagement at an early age within diverse settings with different people, facilitated by my parents when raising myself and my sister, instilled in us with high levels of self-confidence before as well as alongside our formal educations. In chapter 6, it was clear how parents were key in selecting and preparing the participants to gain places at particular educational institutions. Then in chapter 7, the obligations felt by many of the participants to pursue education was, in part, an attribute inspired by parents along with parental involvement at key stages to circumvent potential barriers that they came up against which further demonstrated the significance. Based on this, I provide 4 recommendations that are closely connected to each other which I believe to be crucial for all Black parents and carers when navigating the English education system for and with their children:

1. **Thoroughly understand the education system that your child/ren will enter and journey through as soon as you can:**
    - For the English state education sector, a useful place to start is the 'Education and learning' section on Gov.uk (2019b) which provides an overview of the key stages: https://www.gov.uk/browse/education
    - For the English private education sector, online resources such as: The Good School's Guide's 'Independent School system in a nutshell': https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/choosing-a-school/independent-schools/uk-independent-schools-explained, and The Independent Schools Council: https://www.isc.co.uk are insightful
    - For the English higher education sector, there are impressive initiatives, tailored specifically to guide and support Black families and students like

Leading Routes: https://leadingroutes.org and Target Oxbridge: https://targetoxbridge.co.uk . Many universities also have outreach and widening participation initiatives to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds to address and assist with helping them to come to university. PUSH is one non-profit organisation working in partnership with a range of universities to do this: https://www.push.co.uk/universities.html.

- Familiarise yourself with some of the particular challenges that Black girls and young women face and this research is a great place to start.

2. **Carefully consider the different types of educational institutions to send your child/ren to[120]:**
    - As discussed within chapter 6, there are different barriers that are present within different types of educational institutions- namely predominantly white in contrast to multicultural ones. As children will spend a great deal of time at educational institutions, it is wise to ask yourself, regardless of the educational institution, the following questions:
        - Will my child/ren thrive within this environment?
        - Does the motto, vision and/or mission of the institution fit with my own, my family's and wider community's?
        - How does this institution compare to others in the area and of a similar standard?
        - What is the pupil/student cohort and demographics like and will my child/ren fit in?
        - What, if any, might some challenges be if my child/ren attends this institution? Am I preparing my child/ren and myself to handle them effectively?

[120] I acknowledge that there are already research-informed critical advice for parents choosing schools but these are recommendations based on the research findings

3. **Do not pressure your child/ren to pursue an educational path that *you* want for them:**
    - It is the desire of all parents and carers for their child/ren to succeed and have the best opportunities. But it must be remembered that not all success or opportunities look the same.
    - Moreover, there is a difference between guiding and pressurising child/ren.
    - The education system is already very competitive and stressful as it is so do not add additional pressure on your child/ren
    - In addition, every child is different and therefore what works for one may not necessarily work for another.
    - Allow your child to follow their interests and passions as much as possible and support them through for example, the type of educational institution you educate them within.
    - If in doubt, there are always other people who have similar interests and passions to your child/ren and perhaps by researching or talking to those people, you can find a way to best enable your child to find an appropriate path

4. **Be prepared to support your child/ren consistently and effectively throughout[121]:**
    - If you thoroughly understand the education system and have carefully considered the types of educational institutions that you send your children to, it should lead to being able to navigate and support your child/ren better within the education system.

[121] These resonate with the research about Black middle-class families (Gillborn et al, 2012; Rollock et al, 2015; Ball et al, 2011; Vincent et al, 2013; Vincent et al, 2012a; 2012b)

- Support includes but is not limited to: being available for and approachable to your child/ren at all times; making sure you attend and are part of institutional events like parents' evenings; building relationships, familiarity and/or rapport with staff and other parents; providing extra help when required by your child/ren; advocating for your child/ren on their behalf when needed.[122]
- To 'succeed' in the education system, it requires great investment both on the part of the child/ren but also parents. In this sense, being **consistent** with support, depending on the needs of the child/ren could mean, for example, checking in on them at particular points of the academic year.
- **Effective** support means tailoring it to assist in gaining a particular educational goal. For example, if your child/ren is going to be sitting exams in the following year and they are struggling with a particular subject, by giving them timely extra tuition in that subject area would be effective support in order to assist them in passing.

By first addressing and advising some of the ways that Black girls and young women, as well as their parents and carers can improve educational journeys and experiences. While I note taking personal responsibility is often critiqued as letting institutional racism off the hook, taking such steps can empower individuals and groups and represents a necessary reality driven by the need to cope in the education system. Additionally, both the educational institutions and the government need to support this group. Firstly, I will share some courses of action that can be taken by educational institutions and the government to improve the learning experiences and outcomes of Black British girls and young women.

[122] I acknowledge that these may differ according to parental employment as well as cultural, gendered and classed expectations